

# THE ROUGH ROAD TO ANTWERP: THE FIRST CANADIAN ARMY'S OPERATIONS ALONG THE CHANNEL COAST

A Monograph

by

Major Michael Paul Williams  
Canadian Army



School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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MONOGRAPH APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Major Michael Paul Williams

Monograph Title: The Rough Road to Antwerp: The First Canadian Army's Operations Along the Channel Coast

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Stephen A. Bourque, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_, Seminar Leader  
Uwe F. Jansohn, COL

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 22nd day of May 2014 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

### THE ROUGH ROAD TO ANTWERP: THE FIRST CANADIAN ARMY'S OPERATIONS ALONG THE CHANNEL COAST, by Major Michael Paul Williams, 73 pages.

The First Canadian Army's campaign to secure the Channel Ports in the Pas de Calais, and its subsequent task to secure the Scheldt River Estuary played an important role in the Allied victory over Germany. From the Normandy landings on D-Day, through October 1944, nearly all military equipment and stores transported across the Channel by ship arrived in Normandy, and from there moved forward by ground transport. While this arrangement proved workable at the beginning of the breakout, as the Allies pushed north and east out of Normandy, additional seaports were required.

The Canadians, on the left flank of Montgomery's 21st Army Group, were assigned the responsibility of seizing these ports, and in the case of Antwerp, clearing its approaches of German resistance that would prevent its navigability by Allied ships. Completion of these pivotal tasks, most notably the clearing of the Scheldt, did not receive the attention they deserved. Montgomery did not employ the First Canadian Army to its full potential in the summer and fall of 1944. This monograph looks at three key factors that slowed the Canadians in their efforts to establish seaports for the Allies: the structure of the Canadian Army, the fact that Fifteenth German Army was afforded the time to establish a defense along the Scheldt, and a lack of clear direction on the priority and significance of these objectives. Each of these factors provides insight into why it took the First Canadian Army so long to open the seaport at Antwerp.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
STRUCTURE.....	12
MISSED OPPORTUNITY: THE ESCAPE OF THE FIFTEENTH GERMAN ARMY.....	35
SEAPORTS .....	44
CONCLUSION .....	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	60

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. The Organization of 21st Army Group, September 1, 1944 .....	9
Figure 2. The Divisions and Pre-Normandy Combat Experience of the First Canadian Army, September 1, 1944.....	15
Figure 3. Operation Totalize: The Plan .....	19
Figure 4. Operation Tractable: The Plan .....	21
Figure 5. The Coastal Belt, September 4-12, 1944 .....	23
Figure 6. The Capture of Calais, September 25-October 1, 1944 .....	24
Figure 7. Advance to the Somme and Antwerp.....	36
Figure 8. Fifteenth German Army Organization as of August 31, 1944 .....	37
Figure 9. The Battle of the Scheldt.....	44

## INTRODUCTION

Long before the Allies landed in Normandy, it was planned that First Canadian Army would advance northward from the beachhead to cross the Seine between Rouen and Le Havre. Now, having closed the Falaise Gap and having beaten off the desperate attempts of the enemy to break out of the trap, General Harry Crerar began what was to become one of the most arduous campaigns of the Second World War. Unsung because it seemed unspectacular, it was seen by many to be nothing more than ‘mopping up’. With their eyes looking for a breakout to the east, the world’s press saw little of what went on on the left flank and thereby missed some of the bloodiest infantry battles of the War.

—Jeffery Williams, *The Long Left Flank: Hard-Fought Way to the Reich, 1944-45*

The July and August 1944 War Diary of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry

Highlanders, a Canadian infantry battalion, shows that Lieutenant Harry Murfitt was “killed by enemy action in London!”<sup>1</sup> While the cause of Murfitt’s death has perhaps been lost to history, what is known, is that on the day of his passing, while there was no reported enemy aircraft activity over the skies of the United Kingdom, there were 169 V1 rockets fired from the Pas de Calais area, of which 72 are believed to have struck London claiming 106 fatalities, mostly civilians.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly the exclamation point in the report highlights the author of the War Diary’s disbelief over Murfitt’s untimely and unexpected death while on leave in London. Murfitt’s unit, as part of what would ultimately become the First Canadian Army, was engaged in combat operations in the Caen area following its landings on D-Day and the ensuing weeks of operations while the Allied forces continued their buildup. Ironically, Murfitt’s battalion would ultimately play a role in clearing the Pas de Calais region of the V1 rockets that took his life and

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<sup>1</sup>The Laurier Center for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, Normandy War Diaries, “Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders: July and August 1944,” <http://www.canadianmilitaryhistory.ca/normandy-war-diaries/> (accessed 19 October 2013).

<sup>2</sup>“Weekly Resume (No. 253) of the Naval, Air and Military Situation from 0700 29th July to 0700 6th July 1944,” in War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, *Memoranda*, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, London, CAB 80/44.



would then move on to fight the Fifteenth German Army in Breskens along the Scheldt Estuary with a view to opening Antwerp.

Eliminating the V1 rocket threat, clearing enemy pockets of resistance and opening seaports represent a sampling of the diverse and difficult tasks assigned to the First Canadian Army on the left flank of the Allied advance out of Normandy in the summer and fall of 1944. The Canadian Army, in their push through the Pas de Calais and ultimately into Belgium and the Netherlands, would also be responsible for defeating German coastal fortifications and opening the much needed seaports at LeHavre, Dieppe, Boulogne and Calais. They would also fight a tooth and nail battle against a tenacious German opponent set on preventing Allied shipping from using the Scheldt Estuary and its deep-water port at Antwerp.

In the years since the Second World War, many historians have examined the Normandy campaign, the breakout, and the push to Germany. Canada's official military historian for the Second World War, C. P. Stacey, captured in detail the Canadian Army's involvement in the campaign in Northwest Europe.<sup>3</sup> He drafted his many works with inputs from both official sources and personal interviews with the commanders themselves. As the official historian, Stacey had full access to government files. He served overseas as a historian with the Canadian Military Headquarters and as such, all of the Canadian senior leadership personally knew him. He had the ability to commence the study of material and compilation of data as the fighting was ongoing. Stacey was forced figuratively, to walk "a tightrope between telling the truth, or as much of it as could be elucidated, and ensuring that reputations, both personal and national, were

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<sup>3</sup>C. P. Stacey, *Six Years of War, the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War - Volume I*, 3rd ed. (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1957); C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 - Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War - Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966); C. P. Stacey, *Canada's Battle in Normandy: The Canadian Army's Share in the Operations 6 June-1 September 1944 (the Canadian Army at War)* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1946).

not trampled.”<sup>4</sup> His works, published primarily in the 1950s, achieved critical acclaim but have been criticized by more contemporary scholars for being overly critical of the Canadian Army’s performance and for laying the blame for operational failures on the common soldier and not the senior leadership of the British-Canadian armies.

The late 1990s saw a resurgence in academic interest in the Canadian Army’s campaigns in the Second World War. Led by historians such as Terry Copp,<sup>5</sup> Jack Granatstein,<sup>6</sup> John A. English,<sup>7</sup> and more recently Mark Zuehlke,<sup>8</sup> the operations of the First Canadian Army have been re-examined. None of these scholars had close personal ties to the generals as Stacey did, and as

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<sup>4</sup>Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars (Studies in Canadian Military History)* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 159-160.

<sup>5</sup>Terry Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2007); Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2003); Terry Copp, *Guy Simonds and the Art of Command* (Kingston, Ontario: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007); Terry Copp, ed., *Montgomery's Scientists: Operational Research in Northwest Europe; the Work of No. 2 Operational Research Section with 21 Army Group, June 1944 to July 1945* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000); Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route, Caen* (Alma: Maple Leaf Route, 1983); Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Falaise* (Alma: Maple Leaf Route, 1983); Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Antwerp* (Alma: Maple Leaf Route, 1984); Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt* (Alma: Maple Leaf Route, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *Bloody Victory: Canadians and the D-Day Campaign 1944* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1984); J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2002); J. L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); J. L. Granatstein and Dean F. Oliver, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup>John A. English, *A Perspective On Infantry* (New York: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1981); John A. English, *Patton's Peers: The Forgotten Allied Field Army Commanders of the Western Front, 1944-45* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009); John A. English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

<sup>8</sup>Mark Zuehlke, *Breakout from Juno: First Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, July 4-August 21, 1944 (Canadian Battle)* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013); Mark Zuehlke, *Juno Beach: Canada's D-Day Victory, June 6, 1944* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2005); Mark Zuehlke, *Terrible Victory: First Canadian Army and the Scheldt Estuary Campaign: September 13 - November 6, 1944* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2009).

such, they have highlighted that a portion of the blame for First Canadian Army's difficulties rests firmly on the shoulders of the senior leadership.

British historians have only described the First Canadian Army's responsibilities in passing. Max Hastings,<sup>9</sup> Anthony Beevor,<sup>10</sup> and Chester Wilmot,<sup>11</sup> all speak to the heavy casualties that the Canadians sustained, but provide little explanation of the challenges they were encountering. John Keegan provides more detail on Canada's involvement in Northwestern Europe, dedicating an entire chapter to its involvement in his work *Six Armies in Normandy*.<sup>12</sup> Field Marshal Montgomery's biographers, and those interested in the overall movements of the 21st Army Group also play a key role in furthering the understanding of the relationship between the First Canadian Army and its higher headquarters. Specifically, Nigel Hamilton,<sup>13</sup> and Alistair Horne in consultation with David Montgomery,<sup>14</sup> have all examined Montgomery's perspective on the First Canadian Army. These biographies are of tremendous value to this study, yet at times, these authors' admiration for Montgomery seems to blind them to some of the Field Marshal's more obvious failings and leadership shortcomings. Stephen Ashley Hart's

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<sup>9</sup>Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Vintage, 2006); Max Hastings, *Winston's War: Churchill, 1940-1945* (London: Vintage, 2011).

<sup>10</sup>Antony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010); Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012).

<sup>11</sup>While born in Australia, Chester Wilmot remained a resident of the UK post-war to his death. Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998).

<sup>12</sup>John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris, June 6th-August 25th, 1944* (New York: The Viking Press, 1982); John Keegan, *The Battle for History: Re-Fighting World War II* (New York: Vintage, 1996); John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

<sup>13</sup>Nigel Hamilton, *Master of the Battlefield: Monty's War Years, 1942-1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery*, Condensed ed. (New York: Random House, 1994); Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: The Making of a General, 1887-1942* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

<sup>14</sup>Alistair Horne and David Montgomery, *The Lonely Leader: Monty, 1944-1945*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1994).

*Montgomery and “Colossal Cracks”: The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*

provides a compelling examination of Montgomery as an army group commander. The thesis of this work is that Montgomery and his subordinate commanders conducted their campaigns in Northwestern Europe in a competent and rational manner.<sup>15</sup> Hart provides an unbiased perspective on the Field Marshal’s operational shortcomings, which in many regards lend credence to a counter argument that 21st Army Group was not employed to its maximum potential. Perhaps the most detailed account of the operations surrounding opening Antwerp is that of Major General J. L. Moulton’s *Battle for Antwerp*.<sup>16</sup> Not only is this work impeccably researched and detailed, but Moulton also has the distinction of having served as a battalion commander of a battalion involved in the amphibious assault on Walcheren Island, the last act in the Scheldt campaign.

American historians such as Gerhard Weinburg,<sup>17</sup> Martin Blumenson,<sup>18</sup> Forrest Pogue,<sup>19</sup> Gordon Harrison,<sup>20</sup> Charles B. MacDonald,<sup>21</sup> and more recently Carlos DeEste<sup>22</sup> and Rick

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<sup>15</sup>Stephen Ashley Hart, *Montgomery and “Colossal Cracks”: The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 185.

<sup>16</sup>J. L. Moulton, *Battle for Antwerp* (New York: Hippocrene, 1978).

<sup>17</sup>Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup>Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974); Martin Blumenson, *D-Day and the Battle for Normandy -Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington: Center of Military History, US Army, 1984).

<sup>19</sup>Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command* (Washington: Center of Military History, US Army, 1989).

<sup>20</sup>Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 2004).

<sup>21</sup>Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* (Washington: Center of Military History, US Army, 2012).

<sup>22</sup>Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 50th ed. (London: Harper Perennial, 1994); Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002); Carlo D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996).

Atkinson,<sup>23</sup> have provided outstanding general histories of the campaign, but these works contain less detail about the Canadian Army's role than their British counterparts. Each of these historians has naturally concentrated on the United States Army's role in the campaign, and the relationship between Montgomery and General Eisenhower.

The tension between Stacey's assertion that the soldiers of the First Canadian Army could have done more, the contemporary Canadian historian's viewpoint that the Canadians in fact did do a good job, the Montgomery proponents' argument that Montgomery was brilliant and the lack of study by prominent American and British historians has yet to be resolved. It is clear that this is an area worthy of further examination. To understand the role, strengths and weaknesses of the First Canadian Army and its employment by Montgomery, one must first understand the nature of Canada's participation in the Second World War.

In 1917, Canada was officially at war with Germany the moment Britain declared war (by virtue of being a member of the British Empire). By 1939, it had sufficient autonomy to make the decision to go to war within its own Parliament.<sup>24</sup> The decision to follow Britain to war was easily made based on the strong ties to the United Kingdom.<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of Canadian soldiers who fought in Northwestern Europe were volunteers. Many of these Canadian servicemen had been training in the United Kingdom since December of 1939, when the first convoys of 1st (Cdn) Infantry Division arrived in the United Kingdom.<sup>26</sup> While uniformed and equipped like the British Army, Canadian soldiers did not serve as augmentation for existing

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<sup>23</sup>Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2013).

<sup>24</sup>Gerard S. Vano, *Canada: The Strategic and Military Pawn* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 131-137.

<sup>25</sup>David J. Bercuson, *Maple Leaf Against the Axis: Canada's Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995), 5.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

British formations, but rather formed their own units. The highest level of Canadian command was the army. The First Canadian Army was established overseas on January 26, 1942 with the initial establishment of two corps under its charge: I (Cdn) Corps and II (Cdn) Corps.<sup>27</sup> While it was always known that the First Canadian Army would be subordinate to a British army group commander, the establishment of a distinct Canadian Army ensured that Canadian policy makers retained a degree of control over the employment of the force which was in keeping with national goals and policy.<sup>28</sup> I (Cdn) Corps was detached to the Eighth British Army (for the invasion of Sicily and subsequent operations). While it was believed that this force would be returned to the First Canadian Army prior to Operation Neptune to bolster the Army with experience, this later proved impossible and resulted in I (UK) Corps being provided to First Canadian Army shortly after D-Day.<sup>29</sup>

The Canadian Army's primary contribution to the invasion of June 6, 1944, was 3rd (Cdn) Infantry Division, subordinate to the Second British Army commanded by Lieutenant-General Miles Dempsey, which was in turn subordinate to Montgomery's 21st Army Group.<sup>30</sup> It landed on Juno Beach with the initial task of seizing the area in and around Caen and Carpiquet Airfield and specifically, to "assume a 'covering position' astride the Caen-Bayeux rail and road links just west of Caen on either side of the Mue River and defeat all counterattacks."<sup>31</sup> Over the days following D-Day, the Canadian force continued its build-up in Normandy while

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<sup>27</sup>Paul Dickson, "The Politics of Army Expansion, General H.D.G Crerar and the Creation of First Canadian Army, 1940-41," *The Journal of Military History* 60, no. 2 (April 1996): 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/195654414?accountid=8289> (accessed February 10, 2014).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 183.

<sup>29</sup>Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, 214.

<sup>30</sup>D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 58-61.

<sup>31</sup>Mark Milner, "Stopping the Panzers: Reassessing the Role of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in Normandy, 7-10 June 1944," *The Journal of Military History* 74, no. 2 (April 2010): 491-494.

concurrently fighting Standartenfuhrer Kurt Myer's 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment for control of Carpiquet.<sup>32</sup> On June 11, 1944, the II (Cdn) Corps became operational and assumed responsibility for a sector of the Second British Army's front. Slightly less than two weeks later, on July 23, 1944, the First Canadian Army became operational in Northwest Europe under the command of Lieutenant-General H.D.G. Crerar.<sup>33</sup> While named the First Canadian Army, the army was in reality a multinational force based on the II (Cdn) Corps, I (UK) Corps, and the First Canadian Army's headquarters element. The First Canadian Army was subordinate to Montgomery's 21st Army Group and would remain in that capacity until the end of the war in Europe. From the establishment of the First Canadian Army through the closure of the Falaise Gap on August 21, 1944, the Canadian Army (as with all of the other armies in Northwest Europe) had been engaged in near constant combat against a determined foe. With Normandy secure, the Allies looked to the north and east for their subsequent tasks. For the First Canadian Army, this meant movement north on the left flank of the Allied advance.

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<sup>32</sup>Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy*, 65.

<sup>33</sup>English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command*, 208-209.

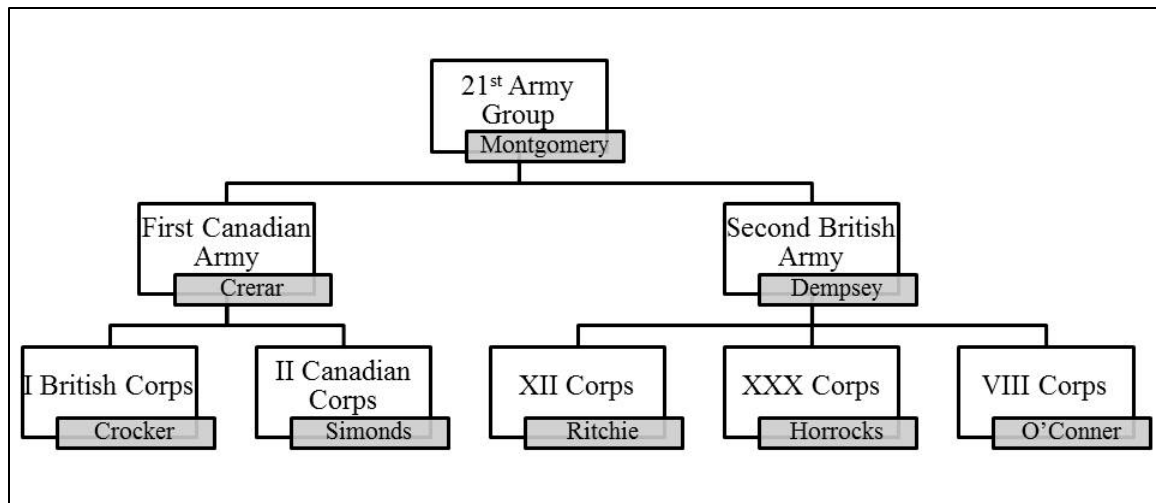


Figure 1. The Organization of 21st Army Group, September 1, 1944

*Source:* Created by author.

The First Canadian Army's campaign to secure the Channel Ports in the Pas de Calais region and their subsequent task to secure the Scheldt River Estuary are not well documented by scholars and historians outside of Canada. From the Normandy landings in June through October 1944, nearly all military equipment and stores transported across the Channel by shipping arrived in Normandy and from there were pushed forward by ground transport. While this arrangement proved workable at the beginning of the breakout, as the Allies pushed north and east out of Normandy, they consumed increasing quantities of supplies and lengthened the road distance between the ports and the most forward elements of the Allied push. Seaports were required to both accommodate greater tonnage of supplies and to greatly reduce the ground transport required.

In many regards, the ground transport issue was the more pressing of the two requirements, as the roads out of Normandy to the most forward deployed elements were extremely congested. Goods could not be pushed out of Normandy as fast as they were arriving,



nor as fast as they were needed to sustain the advance of multiple army groups.<sup>34</sup> Seizure of the Pas de Calais seaports at Le Havre, Dieppe, Boulogne, Calais, Dunkirk and the inland deep-water port at Antwerp were required to shorten distances considerably and to provide the added benefit of greatly increasing the tonnage that could be received on the continent. Complicating this task was the fact that the Fifteenth German Army was deployed in the Pas de Calais region in anticipation of further Allied landings in the area. The fact that these forces remained in the Pas de Calais region throughout the Normandy campaign is a testament to the success of Operation Fortitude, the “unbelievably successful” operation designed to convince the Germans both before and after the invasion that the Pas de Calais region would be the primary landing site.<sup>35</sup> The Fifteenth German Army’s boundaries extended from Antwerp in the north to the Orne River in Normandy. At commencement of the Normandy campaign, Fifteenth German Army numbered 15 divisions in strength.<sup>36</sup> At the close of the Normandy campaign, this Army was in relatively good order and still possessed the capability to fight Allied elements. The First Canadian Army’s task was to clear them out.<sup>37</sup>

Montgomery, and subsequently many historians, have been critical of the role and accomplishments that the First Canadian Army achieved in the weeks following the Normandy campaign through to the opening of Antwerp for Allied shipping. While unquestionably the First Canadian Army fought hard in the summer and fall of 1944, Montgomery did not employ the First Canadian Army to its full potential. As its higher commander, his role was to provide clear direction and priorities, assign realistic and achievable tasks, while bearing in mind the capability

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<sup>34</sup>Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 216-221.

<sup>35</sup>Weinberg, 679-681.

<sup>36</sup>Wilmot, 189-199.

<sup>37</sup>Stacey, *Victory*, 323-324.

of the force. He was charged with maintaining symmetry between his advancing armies to ensure that they were mutually supportive. Montgomery's ambiguous orders to his subordinates which lacked clear direction on the priority of objectives, in part allowed for the escape of the Fifteenth German Army as it crossed the Scheldt in disarray. Finally, and most importantly, Montgomery failed to place due emphasis on the need to open seaports to support both his force and the greater Allied effort. This in turn, hampered First Canadian Army's efforts and moreover, slowed the overall Allied advance. This study will attempt to answer one simple question: why did it take the First Canadian Army so long to clear the approaches to the most important of ports—Antwerp?

In today's parlance, the First Canadian Army on the left flank along the English Channel was responsible for executing an important shaping operation: that of clearing the Allies left flank and seizing seaports for Allied sustainment purposes. Contemporary United States Army doctrine defines a shaping operation as an "operation that establishes conditions for the decisive operation through effects on the enemy, other activities and terrain."<sup>38</sup> While Montgomery and Eisenhower's decisive operation was further inland, the Allies needed seaports to enable their advance from a sustainment perspective. So focused were all concerned with movement to Germany and the pursuit of the German Army in disarray, that completion of this pivotal task was neglected.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, this oversight likely prolonged the war and cost the Allies many thousands of additional casualties.<sup>40</sup> Montgomery did not employ the First Canadian Army to its full potential in the summer and fall of 1944. It lacked the organization, leadership and combat experience to complete the tasks that it was assigned as quickly as Eisenhower desired. When the opportunity arose to destroy the Fifteenth German Army as it crossed the Scheldt in disarray,

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<sup>38</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), 1-12.

<sup>39</sup>D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, 623-624.

<sup>40</sup>Atkinson, 233.

Montgomery failed to act and indeed prevented the First Canadian Army from executing a coup de grâce. Finally, the Field Marshal's ambiguous orders, which lacked clear direction on the priority of objectives, and a failure to place due emphasis on the need to open seaports to support both his force and the greater Allied effort, also contributed to delays.

## STRUCTURE

On September 17, 1944, two months after Lieutenant Murfitt's untimely death in London the soldiers of his battalion, the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, prepared to cross the startline for Operation Wellhit, the attack on the German garrison in Boulogne.<sup>41</sup> They wore British battledress uniforms, carried Lee Enfield rifles, and might have been mistaken for their British counterparts but for their different accents and the CANADA or regimental tab sewn on their shoulders. On this day, the "Glens" as they were affectionately nicknamed,<sup>42</sup> would advance on the right of their brigade, with the North Nova Scotia Regiment on their left, and the Highland Light Infantry of Canada to their rear in reserve. To the Glens' right was 8 (Cdn) Brigade which was also to participate in the division attack on Boulogne.<sup>43</sup>

The 06:30 entry in the Glens' war diary for that day states: "Breakfast has been served and all are tense and wondering what the day holds in store for them."<sup>44</sup> The operation was forecast to take one-day, but ultimately took six, culminating with their brigade commander, Brigadier Rockingham sending the following message to the German commander by megaphone on September 22, 1944:

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<sup>41</sup>Coincidentally, September 17, 1944 also was the first day of Operation Market Garden.

<sup>42</sup>Copp and Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Antwerp*, 142.

<sup>43</sup>Historical Section Canadian Military Headquarters, "Report No. 184, Canadian Participation in the Operations in North-West Europe 1944. Part V: Clearing the Channel Ports, 3 Sep 44 – 6 Feb 45," Ottawa, 19-21.

<sup>44</sup>Copp and Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Antwerp*, 142.

You have lost the battle for Boulogne. Over 7000 prisoners have been taken and all form of resistance has ceased except this position. You are completely surrounded by a large force of all arms. If you surrender now no further casualties will occur . . . If however you do not surrender we will attack you with every means at our disposal . . . You have one hour to make up your mind. Come out with a white flag flying . . . If this does not occur we will commence at once to destroy you and your garrison. You have had your warning, surrender or die from flames.<sup>45</sup>

Lieutenant-General Hiem, the German commander surrendered 50 minutes later, 10 minutes prior to the ultimatum expiring.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Hiem had no other options; an all-arms division including tanks and the much feared “Crocodile” and “Wasp” vehicles surrounded him.<sup>47</sup> While this operation took much longer than expected, and required vast resources,<sup>48</sup> the Glens and the units adjacent to them, were an appropriate force for the job assigned. This was not always the case.

Among the most important tasks that a commander faces is that of ensuring that the force is properly manned, equipped and trained to complete the missions that the commander intends on assigning it. Bearing in mind the forces’ capabilities, an apt commander will employ his subordinate formations to their strengths. Given suitable time, he will train them to perform the specific and specialized tasks that they will be required to perform. Within the 21st Army Group, there were tasks that all subordinate armies were expected to be proficient in: offensive maneuver defense and withdrawal foremost among them.<sup>49</sup> There were also specialized tasks that would require enhanced training: amphibious assault and operations against hardened fortifications to

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<sup>45</sup>Copp and Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Antwerp*, 36.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>The Crocodile was a flame throwing tank, based on the Churchill tank, while the Wasp was a Universal/Bren Gun Carrier with a flame thrower unit attached. Both were highly effective against hardened emplacements.

<sup>48</sup>There were 600 Canadian casualties, 3,356 tons of aircraft bombs expended and 80,000 artillery rounds fired on counter-battery tasks. Historical Section Canadian Military Headquarters, “Report No. 184,” 37.

<sup>49</sup>War Office, *Field Service Regulations Vol. III Operations – Higher Formations 1935* (Ottawa: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1935), 35-61.

list a few.<sup>50</sup> While the First Canadian Army completed all of its assigned tasks and missions, it was not optimally structured to do so. The soldiers and officers fought hard, but they were at a disadvantage due in part to an ill-conceived force structure designed, mandated and implemented by the Canadian national authority. Leadership, personality, inexperience and Montgomery's apparent viewpoint that Canada was a mere colonial underling played a role in causing undue friction and delays in the completion of tasks by the First Canadian Army.<sup>51</sup> While the Canadians ultimately did achieve all of the tasks assigned to them, they were hamstrung by their structure. The army did not have the structure it needed to succeed, especially in the area of organization, leadership and training.

The First Canadian Army became operational in France on July 23, 1944, and consisted of II (Cdn) Corps and I (UK) Corps.<sup>52</sup> Excluding artillery and support elements, the II (Cdn) Corps was composed of two infantry divisions and two armored divisions of which one was Polish. I (UK) Corps consisted of between two and three infantry divisions to which for several weeks in October the 104th (US) Infantry Division was attached.<sup>53</sup> The First Canadian Army generally had between four and five infantry divisions and two armored divisions from August through the opening of the Scheldt River and the port of Antwerp. Only the British forces had been in combat before the June landings. The 51st (UK Highland Division) had fought in the Battle of France (1940), North Africa (1941-1942) and Italy (1943). The 49th (UK West Riding) Infantry Division had also fought in the Battle of France and then participated in the landings of

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<sup>50</sup>War Office, *Field Service Regulations Vol. III Operations – Higher Formations 1935*, 13-14.

<sup>51</sup>Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2007), 286-290.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>53</sup>Jeffery Williams, *The Long Left Flank: Hard-Fought Way to the Reich, 1944-45* (London: Pen and Sword Books, 1988), 111.

the Norway expedition (1940). In the II (Cdn) Corps, only a very small portion of the 2nd (Cdn) Infantry Division had ever seen combat, with those who had participated in the ill-fated amphibious assault on Dieppe in 1942 representing the exception. Of the divisions that would ultimately comprise the First Canadian Army, the 3rd (Cdn) Infantry Division and the 6th (UK) Airborne Divisions were the only two that participated in the amphibious and airborne landing in Normandy on June 6, 1944. The majority of the army arrived in France during the build-up phase and became operational in the weeks following the invasion.<sup>54</sup>

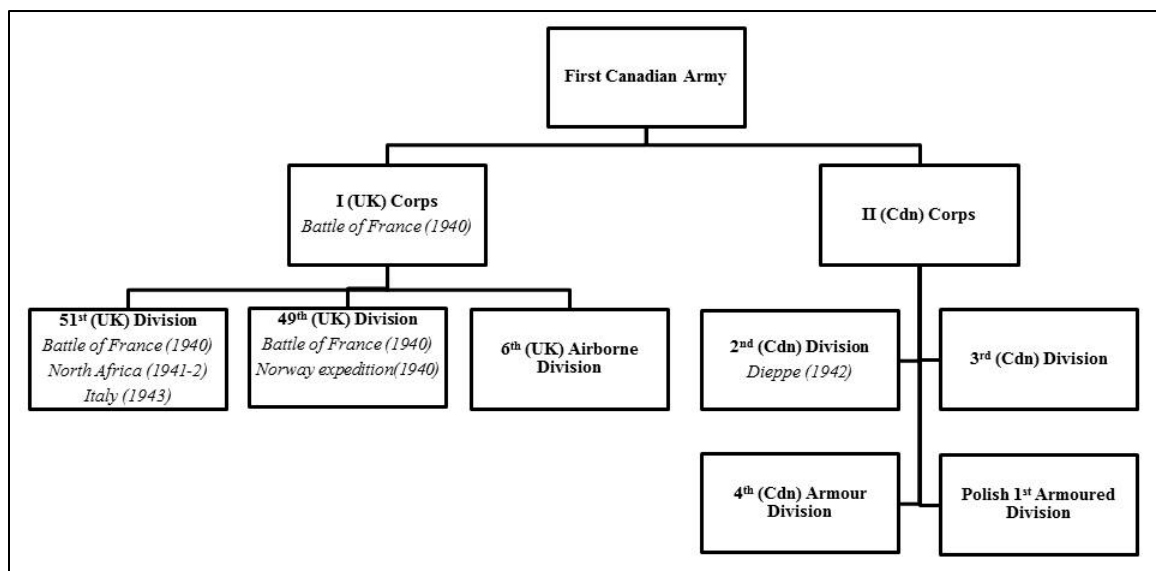


Figure 2. The Divisions and Pre-Normandy Combat Experience of the First Canadian Army, September 1, 1944

Source: Created by author.

From the time that the First Canadian Army became operational, until the ultimate opening of the port of Antwerp on November 28, 1944, it executed three distinct types of

<sup>54</sup>Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General*, 278-283; Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Knopf, 16 November 2004), 134-137.

operations: attack out of the Normandy beachhead; attack to seize seaports along the French coast of the English channel; and attack to destroy enemy elements along the Scheldt Estuary with a view to enabling Allied shipping to safely navigate to Antwerp. The first of these types of operations was to attack out of the beachhead to penetrate the defensive line and destroy the German defenders. These operations included Operations Totalize, Tractable and Fusillade in the Caen and Falaise areas.<sup>55</sup> The Canadians then pushed north out of Normandy, destroying German forces in the Pas de Calais and seizing and opening Channel Ports. These operations included Operations Astonia, Wellhit, and Undergo. Once the Channel Ports were secure, Montgomery reoriented the Army towards Antwerp and the Scheldt Estuary. Operations to clear the Scheldt Estuary consisted of Operation Switchback, Vitality and Infatuate. All of these operations were offensive in nature and were executed in keeping with Montgomery's "set-piece battle" approach.<sup>56</sup>

The British and Canadian Army's approach to operations was disseminated via Field Service Regulation, Army Training Instructions, and Military Training Pamphlets. In essence, these documents represent what would now be termed doctrine publications. Formation commanders were free to issue their own memoranda provided it did not contradict official policy. By 1944, the preponderance of unofficial doctrine was based on experience in North Africa, Sicily and Italy; all areas in which Montgomery had served. Montgomery's experience and personality heavily influenced the operating concept employed by 21st Army Group. Montgomery was a prolific pamphlet writer.<sup>57</sup> While the majority of his pamphlets were

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<sup>55</sup>See appendix A of this monograph for breakdown of the First Canadian Army's operations by date and objectives.

<sup>56</sup>Hart, 103.

<sup>57</sup>The following is a non-exhaustive list of Pamphlets published by Montgomery: Bernard Montgomery, *Some Notes on High Command in War* (Italy: Eighth Army, September 1943); Bernard Montgomery, *Some Notes on the Conduct of War and the Infantry Division in Battle* (Belgium: 21 Army

published after the period covered herein, they were written for military consumption and as such contain greater detail than Montgomery's memoirs which were written for a much broader audience, after the fact. As Montgomery states:

[T]hese pamphlets have no official significance. They represent my own views, and they are based on my own practical experience during a long period of hard fighting which began at Alamein in October 1942 . . . I do not expect for a moment that all senior officers in the Army will agree with my views. But if these pamphlets prove to be of assistance only to one or two commanders in the stress and strain of modern battle, they will have been well worth the writing.<sup>58</sup>

The key tenets of Montgomery's approach were tight centralized control, a reliance on firepower and concentration of force to set favorable conditions and a tendency to show caution.<sup>59</sup> This tendency towards caution was displayed on several occasions when the potential to exploit success presented itself and yet was not exercised.<sup>60</sup> Elements of each are evident in the manner with which Montgomery employed the First Canadian Army in the fall of 1944.

The Normandy breakout operations concluded with the Army's participation in the closure of the Falaise Gap. Operations Totalize and Tractable represent the two major operations that First Canadian Army both planned and executed during the Normandy Campaign. Operation Totalize took place August 8-13, 1944, and involved elements of both I (UK) Corps and II (Cdn) Corps advancing south astride the Caen-Falaise road. This operation was unique in that it is the sole example of First Canadian Army synchronizing the movement of elements of both of its subordinate corps to achieve a common end state. This operation as planned had two phases. In

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Group, 1944); Bernard Montgomery, *Some Notes On the Use of Air Power in Support of Land Operations and Direct Air Support* (Holland: 21 Army Group, 1944); Bernard Montgomery, *The Armoured Division in Battle* (Holland: 21 Army Group, December, 1944); Bernard Montgomery, *Some Notes on High Command in War* (Germany: 21 Army Group, June 1945).

<sup>58</sup>Montgomery, *Some Notes on High Command in War* (1945), 2-3.

<sup>59</sup>Hart, 104-105.

<sup>60</sup>Hart includes the escape of Rommel's Afrika Korps at El Alamein and 21st Army Group's slow pursuit of the Germans post Falaise as prime examples of this phenomenon. Hart emphasizes that Montgomery had a "need to both nurture troop morale and conserve manpower." Ibid., 97-99.



the first phase, objectives would be seized up to the area of Gaumesnil. During the second phase, it was expected that two additional divisions would move south through the initial objectives, to breakthrough a second line of German defenses followed by exploitation by Polish and Canadian armored divisions to both sides of Falaise.<sup>61</sup> Infantrymen moved forward in modified “Priest” vehicles, in order to maximize both protection and speed.<sup>62</sup> All phases were to be preceded by a bombardment by Bomber Command. Despite intense counterattacks, Phase I went largely in accordance with the plan. Bomber aircraft mistakenly engaged 1 (Polish) and 3rd (Cdn) Infantry Divisions prior to them crossing the start line to commence Phase II. Again, the Germans resisted tenaciously, and by August 9, 1944, the First Canadian Army’s attack had culminated in the area of Quesnay (roughly seven miles north of their ultimate objective of Falaise).<sup>63</sup> Had First Canadian Army achieved its final objective of Falaise, it would have done much to encircle the Seventh German Army. Since the Canadians fell well short of their objectives, another operation would be required. Operation Tractable continued the advance south to Falaise.

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<sup>61</sup>Copp and Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Falaise*, 90.

<sup>62</sup>Priest was the nickname given by British and Canadian soldiers to the American built M7 105mm Self Propelled Howitzer. It was modified to carry troops simply by removing the 105mm howitzer and subsequently nicknamed the “unfroked Priests” or “kangaroo.” As a result of the success of this platform, in Operation Totalize and Tractable, on September 1, 1944, 1 Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Squadron was formed. This squadron was further augmented and became First Canadian Armoured Regiment on October 23, 1944. Historical Section Canadian Military Headquarters, “Report No. 184,” 5.

<sup>63</sup>Copp and Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Falaise*, 98.

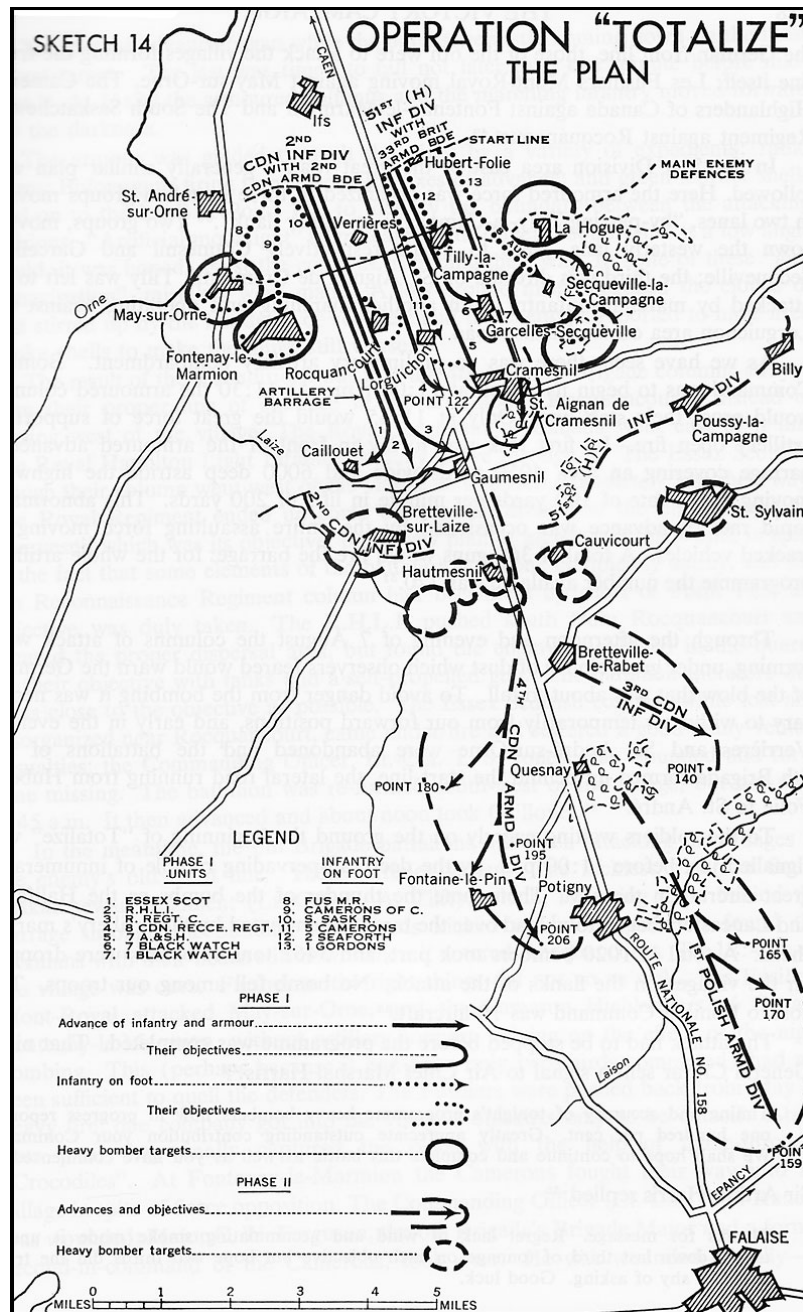


Figure 3. Operation Totalize: The Plan

Source: C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 – the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War – Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966), 217.

Operation Tractable took place August 14-16, 1944, and was similar to that of Operation Totalize. Again, two division sized elements would push south. This time both divisions were Canadian and the axis of advance and objectives were all to the east of the Caen-Falaise road. As had been the case a week earlier, Bomber Command accidentally engaged friendly forces.<sup>64</sup> While the operation was slow, the Canadians did achieve their objectives. This operation in essence transitioned on August 16, 1944, into the final act of the Normandy campaign; the closure of the Falaise Gap. For the following five days, First Canadian Army would push south to close the gap between itself and the Third (United States) Army.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Copp and Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Falaise*, 112-116.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 122-129.

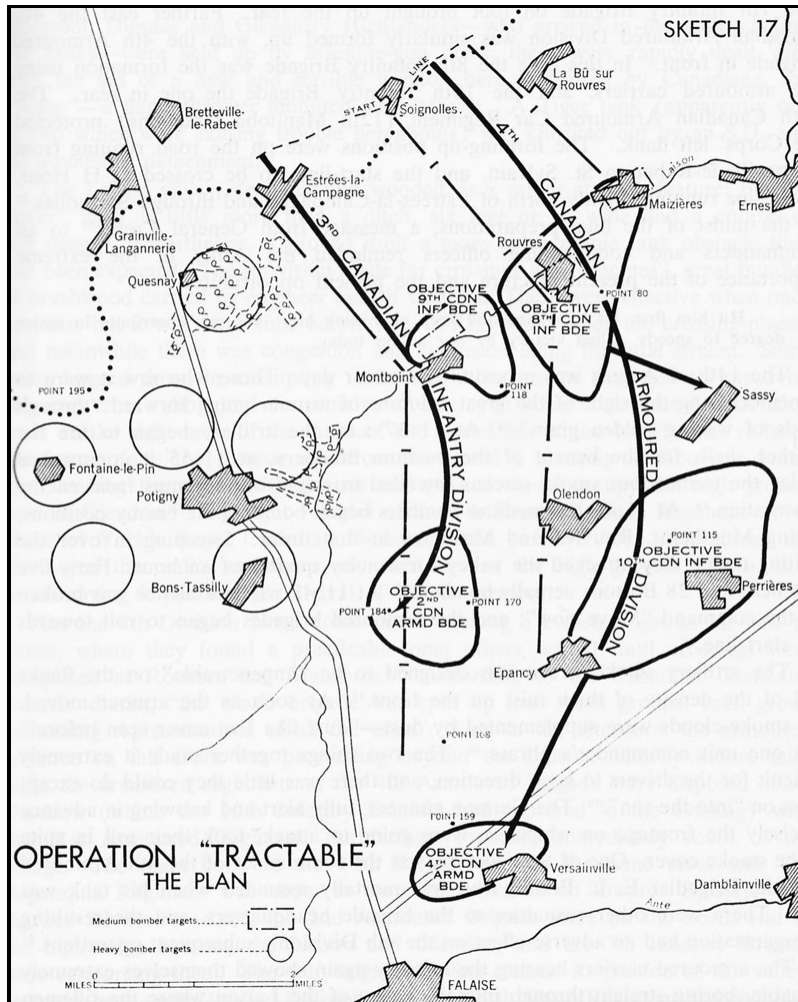


Figure 4. Operation Tractable: The Plan

Source: C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 – the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War – Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966), 239.

Of particular note when considering Canada's involvement in Normandy and beyond is that at close of the battle, the First Canadian Army experienced significant shortages in infantrymen due to an ill-conceived replacement system which did not anticipate the

disproportionate percentage of casualties that would come from the infantry branch.<sup>66</sup> These shortages would impact the First Canadian Army's operations throughout the remainder of 1944.<sup>67</sup> The First Canadian Army now proceeded with its second major task, that of destroying German forces in the Pas de Calais and seizing and opening Channel Ports.

The First Canadian Army's campaign to open the Channel Ports and the clearance of the Pas de Calais region consisted of Operations Astonia, Wellhit, and Undergo, and resulted in the opening of Le Havre, Dieppe, Boulogne and Calais.<sup>68</sup> The First Canadian Army's I (UK) Corps moved west along the north bank of the Seine River in order to seize Le Havre. The remainder of the First Canadian Army, the II (Cdn) Corps, moved north, seizing the seaports which were generally divisional objectives. These objectives were seized in sequence so as to leverage all available air support on the most pressing targets. Each of these objectives consisted of hardened fortifications defended by at minimum a brigade sized German force. These fortifications were fully developed and prepared to resist and were under strict orders from Hitler to stand and fight.<sup>69</sup> These operations involved considerable separation between the two corps, by mid-September this distance exceeded 100 miles, and to all intents and purposes, I (UK) Corps was

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<sup>66</sup>John English argues that this is likely because the assumption was made that casualties would be in keeping with the experience in North Africa, which by 1944 had been well documented. As the North Africa campaign was armor intensive, far fewer infantry replacements had been required. Had the replacement model been based on the experience in Italy which was not as well documented, it would have been better prepared to deal with infantry replacements. English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command*, 174.

<sup>67</sup>Hastings, *Armageddon*, 134-137.

<sup>68</sup>Dunkirk was also an objective of this campaign. The German garrison there refused to surrender and ultimately the decision was made by the Allies to simply "picket and bypass." The port of Dunkirk became largely irrelevant when the Allies secured Antwerp, which was both more capable, and far closer to the frontlines of the Allied forces.

<sup>69</sup>Stacey, *Victory*, 50.

subordinate to First Canadian Army on paper alone. Upon completion of I (UK) Corps' operations in LeHavre, Montgomery had ordered it grounded in location.<sup>70</sup>

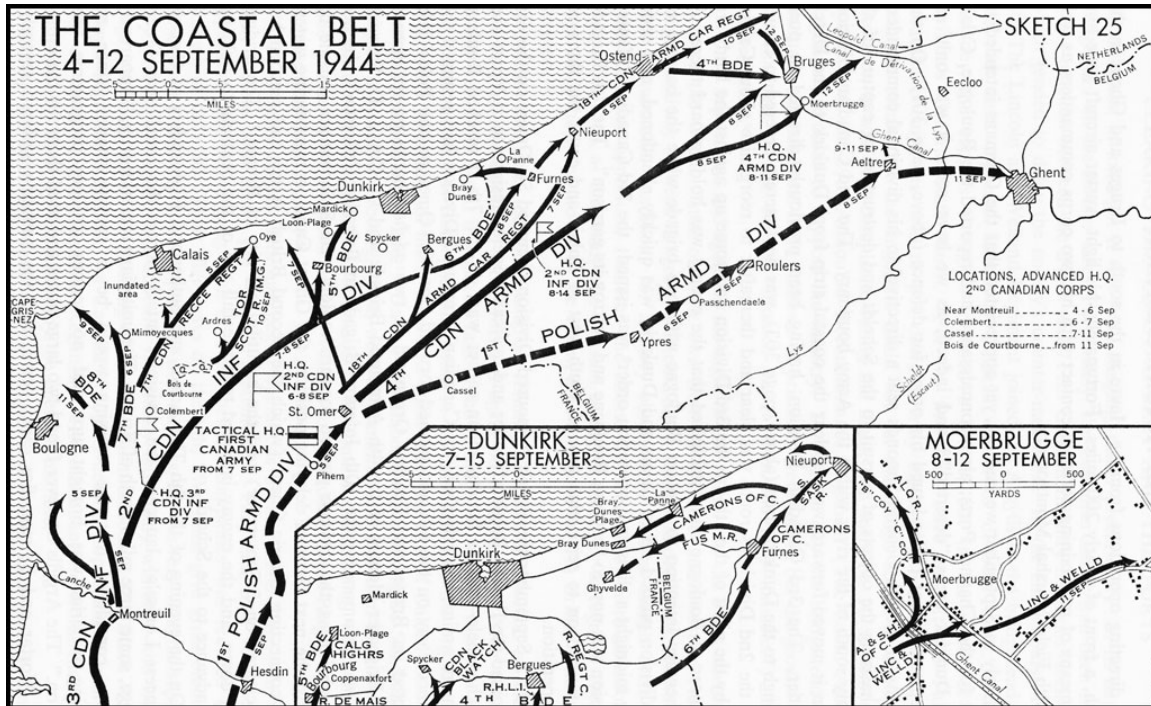


Figure 5. The Coastal Belt, September 4-12, 1944

Source: C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 – the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War – Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966), 325.

Canada's premiere military historian, Terry Copp, aptly describes the opening of the Channel Ports as "siege warfare."<sup>71</sup> He goes on to say that little attention has been paid to this aspect of the Allied campaign to Germany, but a thorough study tells a good deal about the

<sup>70</sup>Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 59.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

Canadian approach to operations after Normandy.<sup>72</sup> The approach that the First Canadian Army employed to prosecute this campaign is very much in keeping with the operating framework ascribed to Montgomery of firepower, concentration of force and caution.

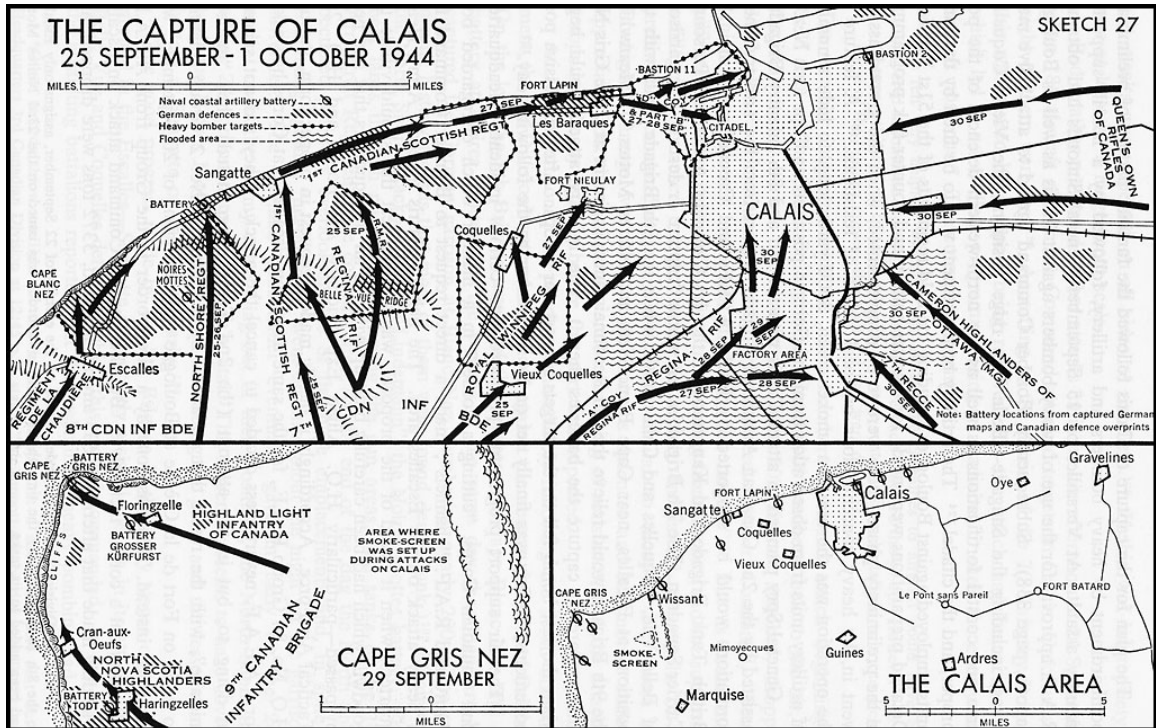


Figure 6. The Capture of Calais, September 25-October 1, 1944

Source: C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 – the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War – Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966), 345.

The First Canadian Army pursued its channel port objectives in series despite the fact that none of the objectives warranted a force of greater than division size.<sup>73</sup> The reason for this systematic and sequential approach to these operations was to ensure that appropriate firepower

<sup>72</sup>Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 60.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 59-64, 66, 77.

resources (both artillery and air force) were available to prosecute the operation. In all cases the division set to seize the objective was augmented by the preponderance of the Army's artillery resources.<sup>74</sup> Since the ports were not engaged simultaneously, the movement of these resources to support the siege did not put the remainder of the Army at risk. Airpower was then employed to engage the enemy positions prior to the assault. The German garrison in Dunkirk was bypassed in order to free the First Canadian Army to clear the German forces from the Scheldt River Estuary and to open Antwerp.<sup>75</sup>

The campaign to clear the Scheldt River Estuary was unquestionably the most difficult fighting that the First Canadian Army was to execute, only rivalled in Canadian Second World War experience by the fighting in the Caen and Falaise regions. II (Cdn) Corps, augmented by additional divisions of both British and American infantry and a British commando brigade, prosecuted these operations.<sup>76</sup> The operations along the Scheldt Estuary were conducted in highly restrictive terrain, largely flooded, and against a determined enemy, tasked to prevent Allied shipping from sailing the Scheldt Estuary.<sup>77</sup> To complete this operation, both banks of the Scheldt would be cleared, and in particular, German concentrations in the Breskens area and on Walcheren Island and the South Beveland Isthmus would have to be dealt with. The operations for Walcheren Island and the South Beveland Isthmus, named Operation Infatuate, was arguably the most complex operation that the Canadians would mount. Unique to this campaign, was the need to plan and execute airborne and amphibious assaults. Ultimately, airborne forces were not

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<sup>74</sup>Historical Section Canadian Military Headquarters, "Report No. 184," app. B, C and D.

<sup>75</sup>"M525, General Operational Situation and Directive: 16 September 1944," in 21 Army Group, *Directives Issued by C-in-C and HQ 21 Army Group*, The National Archive of the United Kingdom, London, WO229/72.

<sup>76</sup>Moulton, 119-27.

<sup>77</sup>Hugh Darby and Marcus Cunliffe, *A Short Story of 21 Army Group* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1949), 87-95.



employed, but Operation Infatuate did include a deliberate brigade sized amphibious assault onto Walcheren Island.<sup>78</sup> The role the leadership element played in these operations is of great importance.

The command's leadership adversely affected the ability of the Canadian Army to achieve its objectives. Leadership undeniably plays a prominent role in the success or failure of an organization. The character, skills and strengths of an individual commander, where possible, must be exploited. Further, the importance of mutual trust between superior and subordinate cannot be overstated. Two Canadian officers commanded the First Canadian Army during the fall of 1944. Their training, experience and aptitude varied considerably, as well as their relationship with their commander, Montgomery. Montgomery did not empower his subordinates, nor did he assume any responsibility for their perceived failings.<sup>79</sup>

Lieutenant-General (later General) H.D.G Crerar commanded the First Canadian Army through the entire campaign in Northwest Europe, although he temporarily relinquished his command as a result of illness.<sup>80</sup> In his absence, he appointed Lieutenant-General G. G. Simonds, the Commander of II (Cdn) Corps, as the acting commander for just over a month. Crerar, as the senior Canadian serviceman in Europe, was the "builder, administrator, liaison officer, chairman of the board and more all while fulfilling both operational and political roles with great competence."<sup>81</sup> Crerar, a career artillery officer, had fought in the First World War, but prior to the Normandy campaign had not seen action in the Second World War. A direct subordinate of

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<sup>78</sup>Moulton, 122.

<sup>79</sup>Hart, 79-88.

<sup>80</sup>Crerar was promoted to general on November 16, 1944, becoming the first Canadian officer to hold the rank "in the field." Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar*, 359.

<sup>81</sup>Dean F. Oliver, "In the Shadows of the Corps: Historiography, Generalship, and Harry Crerar," in *Warrior Chiefs: Perspectives on Senior Canadian Military Leaders*, eds. Bernd Horn and Stephen Harris (Toronto: Dundurn, 2001), 102.

Montgomery, Crerar and Montgomery were frequently in disagreement which undoubtedly caused undue friction. The root of this disagreement can partially be explained through the examination of a letter written by Crerar to one of his subordinates, describing the intricacies of working for or with a British commander:

[N]o Canadian, or American, or other 'national commander,' unless possessing quite phenomenal qualities, is ever rated as high as an equivalent Britisher. It also means that, to a British Army Commander . . . the existence of a Canadian higher formation, such as a Corps is a distinctly troublesome factor.<sup>82</sup>

In Montgomery's eyes, Crerar possessed no such phenomenal qualities, as Montgomery biographers Horne and Montgomery (David) attest, writing on Montgomery's initial impressions of the Canadian leadership:

[T]he views he formed (which he did little effort to conceal) of some of them, such as McNaughton and Crerar, were not auspicious; he held them guilty of 'playing politics' and 'bellyaching' - one of the most damning epithets in the Monty vocabulary. This early tension with Crerar in particular would bear its repercussions from D-Day onwards.<sup>83</sup>

In Montgomery's own words: "I have great fears that Harry Crerar will not be too good; however I am keeping him out of the party as long as I can."<sup>84</sup> True to Montgomery's words, while Crerar arrived in Normandy on June 18, 1944, the First Canadian Army was not to become operational for over a month, a month in which Crerar in essence simply waited for his opportunity to assume command of his army.<sup>85</sup>

The day that the First Canadian Army became operational, Crerar was quick to commence operations in accordance with Montgomery's direction. Among his earliest actions, Crerar ordered the I (UK) Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General Crocker, to secure objectives in

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<sup>82</sup>Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar*, 273.

<sup>83</sup>Horne and Montgomery, 46. General McNaughton served as the Commander of First Canadian Army until General Crerar assumed command in 1943.

<sup>84</sup>Hamilton, *Monty: The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery*, 303.

<sup>85</sup>Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar*, 268-282.

the vicinity of the French town of Troarn. Crocker, despite being under the command of the First Canadian Army, refused the order. Crerar lodged a complaint to Montgomery, firmly believing that Montgomery should remove Crocker from command. Montgomery sided with Crocker, thereby immediately undermining Crerar's authority, making clear that providing direction to I (UK) Corps was not within Crerar's terms of reference.<sup>86</sup> In essence, on day one of its existence as an army, Montgomery stymied Crerar's ability to command half of his force. On September 25, 1944, Crerar was required to return to England for medical treatment. In his absence, Lieutenant-General G. G Simonds assumed the role of acting commander of the First Canadian Army.<sup>87</sup>

Lieutenant-General G. G Simonds served as acting commander of the First Canadian Army from September 26, 1944, to November 7, 1944.<sup>88</sup> While this was a mere 43 days, it in essence represents the entire period of the First Canadian Army's operation to open the Scheldt. Simonds, like Crerar, was a career artillery officer. He was 15 years younger than Crerar and as such he had been too young to participate in the First World War. In March of 1943, Simonds was sent to Tunisia where he observed combat operations firsthand for the first time in his career.<sup>89</sup> It was here that he met Montgomery.<sup>90</sup> Simonds was unexpectedly appointed to serve as the Commander of 1st (Cdn) Infantry Division for the invasion of Sicily when its designated commander was killed in an unfortunate plane crash. Simonds gained invaluable combat experience while serving as a division commander in Montgomery's Eighth Army. To further

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<sup>86</sup>Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar*, 285-289.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 354-359.

<sup>89</sup>Roman Jarymowycz, "General Guy Simonds: The Commander as Tragic Hero," in *Warrior Chiefs: Perspectives on Senior Canadian Military Leaders*, eds. Bernd Horn and Stephen Harris (Toronto: Dundurn, 2001), 110.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*

broaden his experience, Simonds was afforded a second division level, combat command. From October 1943 through January 1944, he commanded 5th (Cdn) Armoured Division.<sup>91</sup>

Prior to assuming the role of acting army commander, Simonds would further develop his combat credentials as the Commander of II (Cdn) Corps. This headquarters was largely responsible for the detailed planning and execution of First Canadian Army's operations—operations such as Totalize and Tractable.

Montgomery held Simonds in the highest esteem. Horne and Montgomery (David) suggest that the Field Marshal deemed Simonds as “far and away the best of the Canadian commanders if not one of the best of all.”<sup>92</sup> Simonds undeniably proved himself a talented army commander, and ultimately, his actions to open the Scheldt helped “affect a strategic decision in the war.”<sup>93</sup> What cannot be proven is if the favoritism shown to Simonds, and the hostility shown towards Crerar did not play a role in the successes and failures of the First Canadian Army.

The structure of the Canadian element of the First Canadian Army, very closely resembled similar British formations, although Canadian formations contained a slightly higher percentage of troops employed in a support capacity than did the British.<sup>94</sup> Arguably, the infantry was the prominent branch in the campaign. Canada faltered in its structure and capacity to regenerate. American infantry divisions of the day contained 65 percent infantrymen, while the Canadian equivalent, although 20 percent larger, contained only 45 percent infantrymen.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Jarymowycz, “General Guy Simonds: The Commander as Tragic Hero,” 111-112.

<sup>92</sup>Horne and Montgomery, 180.

<sup>93</sup>Jarymowycz, 131.

<sup>94</sup>Bercuson, 18.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

Put bluntly, the Canadian Army contained too many cooks and bottle-washers and too few riflemen, and the blame for this must be laid totally at the door of National Defense Headquarters in Ottawa, which set the establishment for Canadian Divisions.<sup>96</sup>

More problematic than the doctrinal manning of the Canadian divisions was the mechanism in place to regenerate combat forces through replacements.

While the Americans had an effective apparatus in place by fall of 1944 to replace battle casualties, the same was not true for the British and Canadian militaries. In no branch was the shortfall more evident than in the infantry branch, which sustained nearly 70 percent of the casualties.<sup>97</sup> Having rapidly depleted existing replacement pools, both forces had to take more drastic measures. The British, graced with a much larger existing force, simply disbanded an infantry division held in reserve in the United Kingdom for use as replacements in Northwestern Europe. Canada, having no un-tasked formations to draw from, had to take more drastic measures: to carry on with the mission despite the shortages and to commence retraining soldiers from other branches to fill the void.<sup>98</sup>

The Canadian plan for replacements was predicated upon the assumption that the war would be short in duration, and that the existing protocol for replacements would be capable of satisfying the needs of the force. Both of these assumptions were incorrect. The Canadian system for immediate replacements saw the creation of Number Two Reinforcement Group. Number Two Reinforcement Group was comprised of four battalions each consisting of 1,500 men.<sup>99</sup> Two of these battalions were pure infantry with the other two containing all other branches. Tank and

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<sup>96</sup>Bercuson, 19.

<sup>97</sup>Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 6.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, "Report No.53, Canadian Organization in Theatres of Operations, 1939-1945," Ottawa, 1952.

armored vehicle crews were subject to a different replacement system.<sup>100</sup> These battalions existed with the sole purpose of providing individual replacements to the divisions. This system enabled 6,000 men to be ready for onward movement at any given time based on the needs of the army. Half of these replacements were infantry. Onward movement itself was a three to five day process depending on the ultimate destination.<sup>101</sup> The vital flaw in this system, which most impacted the First Canadian Army's effectiveness and more specifically the II (Cdn) Corps, was that infantry casualties sustained, far exceeded the availability in Number Two Reinforcement Group until late October 1944.<sup>102</sup>

As the First Canadian Army executed operations, there were times when the infantry element was equivalent in size to only two United States divisions. First Canadian Army might better have been described as a Corps Minus, this would more fairly describe the combat power of this force.<sup>103</sup> The Canadian Army's manning shortfalls must not only be attributed to a replacement system that did not foresee the quantities of infantrymen required to complete the task at hand (although this omission is borderline negligence as these figures were in keeping with those experienced in Sicily and Italy); the Canadian shortfall is also the product of a greater number of days in contact with the enemy than any other formation in Montgomery's 21st Army Group.<sup>104</sup> The pre-combat training of the Canadian element is worthy of note.

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<sup>100</sup>The 25th Armored Delivery Regiment provided tanks and armor crewmen such that replacement vehicles and crews could train together and would arrive on the battlefield prepared to immediately fight.

<sup>101</sup>Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, "Report No.53."

<sup>102</sup>Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 297.

<sup>103</sup>The term "minus" denotes a formation that is less than full strength due to detached forces or combat ineffective units.

<sup>104</sup>Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy*, 267.

Leadership and manpower were not the only issues with the structure of First Canadian Army. Lacking the combat experience of their British and American colleagues, the Canadian Army was largely reliant on the training conducted in Britain to prepare it for its eventual role in Northwestern Europe. This section of the paper will examine the nature of the training in which the Canadian element participated in broad terms, paying particular attention to command and control relationships, key tasks, and inter-service and combined arms cooperation.

The Canadian Army's training scheme in Britain can generally be divided into three phases: from 1940-1941, the Canadian Army trained to defeat invasion of Britain; from 1942-1943, training focused on offensive operations; and from early 1943 onwards, training focused on large-scale operations and training using the anticipated order of battle that would be employed on the continent.<sup>105</sup> The four years of training may have created a false sense of professional competence. It has been argued that the Canadians did not take the training as seriously as they should have. As *Six Years of War, the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War* records:

Time was lost in the early days through equipment shortages; and it was only gradually that the more realistic training methods which yielded such good results were evolved and adopted. It is the present writer's impression however, that the Canadian Army also suffered from possessing a proportion of regimental officers whose attitude towards training was casual and haphazard rather than urgent and scientific: like the traditional amateur actor, they were cheerfully confident that it would 'be all right on the night' without having to exert themselves too much.<sup>106</sup>

While the training may not have been optimal, certainly by 1943 worthwhile training was taking place. In March 1943, the Canadian Army participated in a two-week exercise referred to as Exercise Spartan. This was the first and only time that the complete army trained together, and more importantly, the first time the First Canadian Army Headquarters had the opportunity to

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<sup>105</sup>Stacey, *Six Years of War, Volume I, the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, 234-253.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 253.

command and control multiple corps sized formations.<sup>107</sup> Notably absent from this training event was Crerar, who had not assumed command of the First Canadian Army at this point. While many lessons were learned by the staff on the intricacies of large unit command and control, Crerar was never afforded a similar opportunity.<sup>108</sup>

Training for the invasion and the breakout commenced in late 1943. The 3rd (Cdn) Infantry Division, which landed with I (UK) Corps on June 6, 1944, was detached to this formation many months in advance of the invasion and therefore conducted months of specific invasion training.<sup>109</sup> Concurrently, the remaining Canadian divisions conducted training specific to the breakout of a beachhead on the continent, and in particular assault crossings of tidal estuaries. This training would serve them well in late 1944.<sup>110</sup> In writing on the preparedness of the Canadian Army for operations on the Continent, Canadian military historian Bernd Horn notes:

The final American product was sent to a finishing school in North Africa, while the Canadian armored force - per capita the most mechanized of the Allied armies - arrived in Normandy having not completed a single operation or tactical exercise with its new corps commander or division commander.<sup>111</sup>

Omitted by Horn, but equally relevant, is that the same could be said of the First Canadian Army Commander. While most of the force had trained, key individuals were to attempt their trade for the first time under fire.

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<sup>107</sup>Bercuson, 74.

<sup>108</sup>Simonds was also absent (conducting operations in the Mediterranean Theatre), and likewise was never afforded the opportunity to command a corps or army in the training environment.

<sup>109</sup>Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, 257.

<sup>110</sup>Stacey, *Six Years of War, Volume I, the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, 252-253.

<sup>111</sup>Jarymowycz, 131.



Nominally Canadian, the First Canadian Army was in reality a multi-national force under a Canadian command structure. While it fought with dogged determination in the late summer and fall of 1944, its structure, training, experience and leadership handicapped it. Coupled with the inhospitable terrain on which it was required to fight and a determined foe, it is not surprising that the First Canadian Army experienced difficulty achieving its assigned tasks. The Canadian Army's organization failed to provide sufficient infantrymen to guarantee quick success. The replacement system was such that manpower replacements could not be provided as quickly as casualties were being sustained. By mid-September, the First Canadian Army was operating with only 60 percent of its infantrymen. Even more disturbing is that this did not mean that the army was short a division, but rather nearly every maneuver unit in the force was operating at 65 percent. As an example, when the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry assaulted Bolougne, their infantry companies were 85 strong out of an establishment of 127.<sup>112</sup> In simple terms, the 10-man section that had trained together was now operating as a six-man section;<sup>113</sup> the 40-man platoon was now 24 men and so on. The First Canadian Army had to make do with what they had. Personality conflict and inexperience also weighed heavily in the difficulties experienced by the First Canadian Army which resulted in delays in completion of tasks and missions. All of these factors played a role, but so did the enemy, who fought a determined rear guard action under orders to hold their ground at all costs. The next section of this paper will closely examine that army.

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<sup>112</sup>Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters, "Report No. 184," 25.

<sup>113</sup>Within the British and Canadian armies the term section is roughly equivalent to the US Army term squad.

## MISSED OPPORTUNITY: THE ESCAPE OF THE FIFTEENTH GERMAN ARMY

On September 4, 1944, soldiers of General Sir Miles Dempsey's Second Army seized the ports at the Belgian city of Antwerp. The advance had been so rapid that the German force charged with defending the city and more importantly the seaports had failed to take measures to deny the Allies use of the port facilities. General Sir Brian Horrocks, the Corps Commander of XXX (UK) Corps, the force that seized Antwerp, recalls in his memoirs that although he did not realize it at the time, "this was the high point of the 1944 offensive" and that from this point onwards, "things began to go wrong."<sup>114</sup> He further states:

If I had ordered Roberts to bypass Antwerp and advance for only fifteen miles north-west, in order to cut off the Beveland isthmus, the whole of this force [German Fifteenth Army], which played such a prominent part in the subsequent fighting, might have been destroyed or forced to surrender. Napoleon, no doubt, would have realized this, but I am afraid Horrocks didn't.<sup>115</sup>

Major General "Pip" Roberts, the division commander of the 11 (UK) Armoured Division that took Antwerp, while comparing the German retreat at Alamein to that in Northwestern Europe assessed that "one armoured division, even below strength, could have cut off and captured all Rommel's army, so reduced was he in strength."<sup>116</sup> Instead, the 21st Army Group did not exploit the advantage gained by securing the ports of Antwerp intact. Rather than immediately clearing the Scheldt Estuary, which would have enabled Allied shipping to reach Antwerp, Montgomery had Second British Army continue towards the Rhine. This mistake enabled the Fifteenth German Army to escape and ultimately delayed the opening of Antwerp as a useable port by many weeks and in essence halted the entire Allied advance for want of supplies.

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<sup>114</sup>Brian Horrocks, *Corps Commander* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 79.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>116</sup>Roberts clearly implies that this was also the case in early September 1944 against German Army Group B. G.P.B. Roberts, *From the Desert to the Baltic* (London: Kimber, 1987), 211-212.

As an army group commander Montgomery had to understand the operational situation and to make decisions which supported strategic needs. He had to synchronize and maintain symmetry between the two armies in his charge, to maintain tempo, provide clear priorities and appropriate resources to his subordinate units to achieve the tasks he assigned. Failure to immediately exploit the seizure of Antwerp's ports intact was a mistake of unrivalled proportion. The escape of the German Fifteenth Army across the Scheldt in September 1944 resulted in unprecedented delay to Allied operations. This force both possessed viable combat power and was able to use that power to effectively deny the Allies the use of Antwerp as a seaport for over two months.

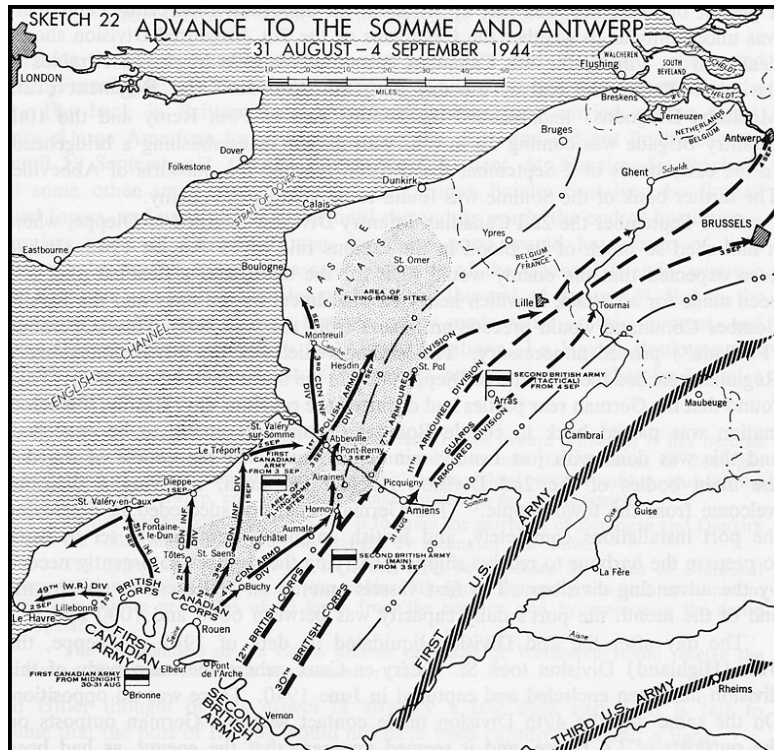


Figure 7. Advance to the Somme and Antwerp

Source: C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 – the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War – Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966), 299.

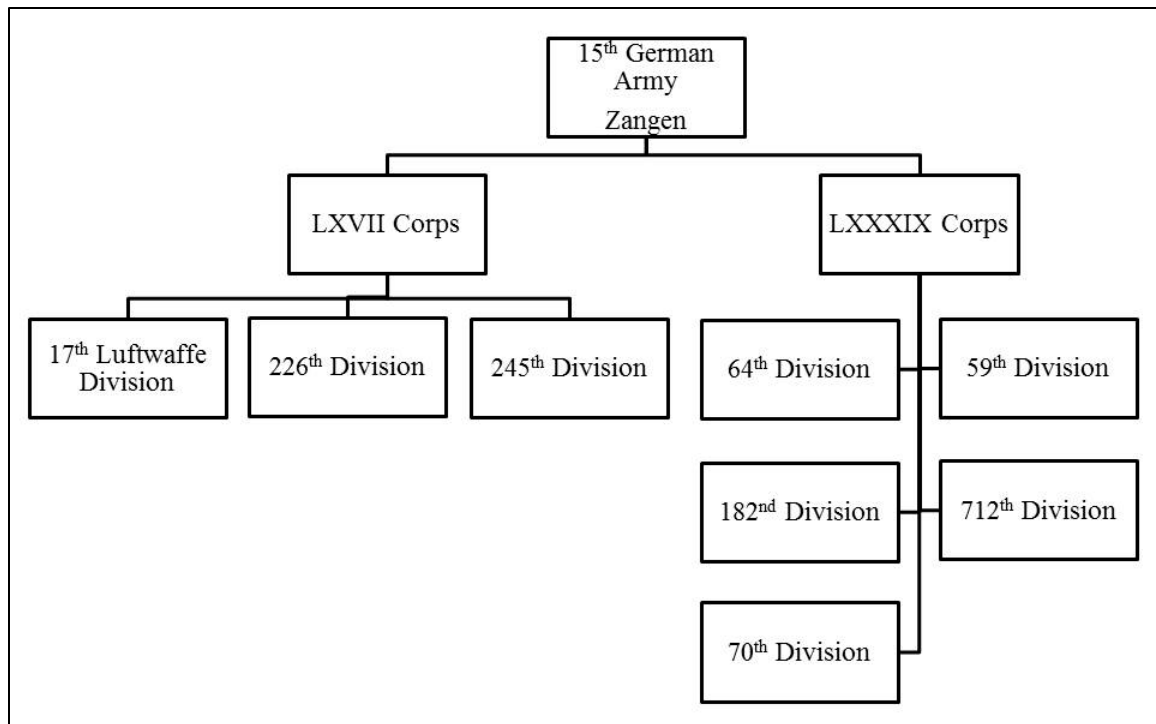


Figure 8. Fifteenth German Army Organization as of August 31, 1944

*Source:* Created by author using information from US Army Combined Arms Center, “Nafziger Order of Battle Collection,” US Army, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/CGSC/CARL/nafziger/939GXXN.pdf> (accessed 23 January 2014).

The Fifteenth German Army was a subordinate formation of Army Group B under Field Marshal Walter Model, which in turn was subordinate to Oberbefehlshaber West.<sup>117</sup> By late August, 1944, Fifteenth Army consisted of two corps, which commanded a total of eight divisions.<sup>118</sup> Operation Fortitude had succeeded in fixing the bulk of Fifteenth German Army in the Pas de Calais area throughout the entire Normandy campaign. Since it was the fear of follow-on invasion, and not actual combat operations that fixed these force elements of Fifteenth Army

<sup>117</sup>James A. Wood, ed., *Army of the West: The Weekly Reports of German Army Group B from Normandy to the West Wall* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007), 245.

<sup>118</sup>Samuel W. Mitcham, *Retreat to the Reich: The German Defeat in France, 1944* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 141.

in the Pas de Calais region, they were in relatively good order. As the Allies broke out of Normandy and crossed the River Seine in late August, the Fifteenth's position became largely untenable. On August 25, 1944, Field Marshal von Zangen assumed command of the Fifteenth Army when his predecessor, Field Marshal von Salmuth<sup>119</sup> was fired by Hitler.<sup>120</sup> When elements of XXX (UK) Corps secured Antwerp, the German forces in the Pas de Calais region faced a formidable problem: eastward retreat was impossible due to the positioning of the Second British Army; the English Channel was to their immediate west; the First Canadian Army was to their south moving north, and the Scheldt River Estuary was to their north, greatly complicating further movement in this direction. As Canada's official Second World War historian aptly stated in his seminal work *The Victory Campaign*:

The German army as we shall see, showed extraordinary power of recovery. It stabilized the situation in the Netherlands and on the western frontiers of Germany, and we had to fight a succession of hard battles before Hitler's regime collapsed the following spring.<sup>121</sup>

It was immediately following the loss of Antwerp that the "recovery" that Stacey described began in earnest.<sup>122</sup> The day the Allies seized Antwerp, Hitler sent orders for his forces to retain the Channel Ports within the Pas de Calais region and for the remainder of the Fifteenth Army to retire to a position north of the Scheldt. From here they would deny the approaches to Antwerp.<sup>123</sup> Hitler's directive read:

Because of the breakthrough of enemy tank forces towards Antwerp, it has become very important for the further progress of the war to hold the fortress of Boulogne and

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<sup>119</sup>Salmuth was fired not because of ineptitude but rather because he was aware of plans for an anti-Hitler putsch, Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr., *Defenders of Fortress Europe: The Untold Story of the German Officers During the Allied Invasion* (Washington: Potomac Books Inc., 2009), 193.

<sup>120</sup>Mitcham, *Retreat to the Reich: The German Defeat in France, 1944*, 223.

<sup>121</sup>Stacey, *Victory*, 277.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup>Wood, 199.

Dunkirk, the Calais defense area, Walcheran Island with Flushing harbor, the beachhead at Antwerp, and the Albert Canal position as far as Maastricht.

a. For this purpose the Fifteenth Army is to bring the garrisons of Boulogne and Dunkirk and the Calais defense area up to strength by means of full units.<sup>124</sup>

Hitler created what would be termed “Fortress Scheldt North” and “Fortress Scheldt South” with a view to delaying the Allied advance while preparing defensive positions along the Rhine.<sup>125</sup>

Neither were true fortresses; the term fortress was used by Hitler to denote the strategic importance of this terrain.<sup>126</sup> Weinberg recounts that Hitler had assigned units to hold these “Fortress” garrisons “until quite literally the last round of ammunition and the last man.”<sup>127</sup> The escape of the Fifteenth German Army across the Scheldt and the delay that they subsequently inflicted on the Allies’ advance are unrivaled in the campaign in Northwestern Europe.

Max Hastings describes the German escape across the Scheldt as “an operation as skillful and as important as their withdrawal from Sicily into Italy across the Straits of Messina a year before.”<sup>128</sup> In an operation strikingly similar to the British escape from Dunkirk in 1940, in the span of roughly two weeks, an army was ferried to safety in the face of near certain destruction. Using a flotilla of roughly 70 craft ranging from fishing boats to minesweepers, the army was ferried from the ports of Breskens and Termeuzen to the towns of Flushing and Hansweert respectively. From these Dutch ports on the South Beveland Peninsula, the preponderance of this force then conducted ground movement eastwards effectively bypassing the Allied forces in the

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<sup>124</sup>*Fuhrer Directives and Other Top Level Directives of the German Armed Forces, 1942-1945: Hitler’s Directives* (New York: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 175.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup>Historical Section (G.S.), Army Headquarters, “Report No. 69, The Campaign in North-West Europe, Information From German Sources, Part III: German Defence Operations in the Sphere of First Canadian Army (23 Aug – 8 Nov 44),” Ottawa, 27.

<sup>127</sup>Weinberg, 696.

<sup>128</sup>Hastings, *Armageddon*, 20.

area of Antwerp. This operation began on September 7, 1944, and concluded on September 21, 1944.<sup>129</sup> In post-war interrogation, von Zangen expressed that he had little enthusiasm for a ferry operation which would move his forces to a peninsula which could easily be cut-off, trapping his forces.<sup>130</sup> The reality however, is that he had no viable options. Although harried by Allied airpower, throughout the operation, it was not until September 19, 1944, that Allied ground forces challenged the south bank beachhead.<sup>131</sup> Montgomery had options that he could have implemented to counter this escape.

Intelligence summaries provided by Second British Army to 21st Army Group Headquarters indicate that the Allies were observing the escape of the Fifteenth German Army.<sup>132</sup> Aerial photos of the movement and the Royal Air Force's continuous engagement of the ferry operation and its associated ports is further testament that the Allies knew of this movement. In the 21st Army Group "WOSTEL" which was in essence a weekly situation report, for the period ending 24:00 September 16, 1944, the "General" paragraph reads: "In the area west of Antwerp and north of Ghent the enemy has been resisting fiercely to permit the continued evacuation of his troops across the West Scheldt."<sup>133</sup> Finally, Ultra intercepts confirmed that German forces were intent on defending the Scheldt.<sup>134</sup> Montgomery was so focused on a thrust into Germany and a

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<sup>129</sup>S. J. DeGroot, "Escape of the German Army Across the Westerscheldt, September 1944," *Canadian Military History* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 109-117.

<sup>130</sup>Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters, "Report No. 69," 22.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>132</sup>Stacey, *Victory*. 302.

<sup>133</sup>"WOSTEL No. 1, Period up to 2400 hours 16 September 1944," in 21 Army Group, *Directives Issued by C-in-C and HQ 21 Army Group*.

<sup>134</sup>John A. Adams, *The Battle for Western Europe, Fall 1944: An Operational Assessment*, Twentieth-Century Battles (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 110; Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar*, 340.

rapid end to the war, that he was blind to the activity immediately to his army's front.<sup>135</sup> While it is not the intent of this paper to delve into the realm of counterfactuals, it is germane to the thesis argued herein that Montgomery had distinct options which he might have exercised pertaining to the Fifteenth German Army which might have led to more favorable results.

The options open to the Field Marshal would have included the dispatching of elements of Second Army to the west along the South Bank of the Scheldt to envelop the Fifteenth Army; sending elements of the Second Army along the north bank of the Scheldt, to establish a blocking position forcing the Fifteenth Army to fight for the far bank, while they were engaged by the First Canadian Army; he might have simply tasked the First Canadian Army to exploit the German retreat, foregoing or temporarily suspending the Canadian task of opening the Channel Ports with a view to destroying Fifteenth Army when they were most vulnerable. Montgomery surely had options, but failed to exercise them. Instead, in the two weeks following the Allied seizure of Antwerp, the Fifteenth German Army successfully ferried in excess of 65,000 men and their equipment across the Scheldt.<sup>136</sup> This of course begs the question: what direction was Montgomery giving to his subordinate commanders at this point in the campaign?

On August 21, 1944, the Battle of Normandy ended with the closure of the Falaise Gap. On August 26, 1944, Montgomery issued his General Operational Situation and Directive M520. This order contained three tasks confronting 21st Army Group: to operate in, and destroy enemy forces in Northeast France and Belgium, to secure the Pas de Calais area and the airfields in Belgium and "to secure Antwerp as a Base."<sup>137</sup> The tasks specifically assigned to the First

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<sup>135</sup>Stacey, *Victory*. 302.

<sup>136</sup>DeGroot says 100,000 men and 6,000 vehicles, DeGroot, 20; Hasting says 65,000 men and considerably fewer vehicles, Hastings 109; Horrocks says 82,000 men or the remnants of eight divisions, Horrocks, 81.

<sup>137</sup>"M520, General Operational Situation and Directive: 26 August 1944," in 21 Army Group, *Directives Issued by C-in-C and HQ 21 Army Group*.



Canadian Army were to secure Dieppe and advance up the coast to Bruges, destroying enemy forces while sending a corps to secure the port of LeHavre.<sup>138</sup> In this same directive Montgomery cautions his force “to by-pass enemy centers of resistance” and that “any tendency to be ‘sticky’ or cautious must be stamped out ruthlessly.”<sup>139</sup> On September 3, 1944, Montgomery issued General Operational Situation and Directive M523, which gave the Second British Army the task of advancing eastward from a line extending between Brussels and Antwerp, while the First Canadian Army would remain in the Bruges-Calais region “until the maintenance situation allows of its employment further forward.”<sup>140</sup> Six of the Fifteenth German Army’s eight divisions were trapped south of the Scheldt and yet no one was tasked to deal with them.<sup>141</sup> And so it remained until Fifteenth Army escaped across the Scheldt. On September 13, 1944, Montgomery asked Crerar if he could simultaneously open the Channel Ports while clearing the approaches to Antwerp. While planning commenced, this task was well beyond the capabilities of an army already engaged with the enemy.<sup>142</sup>

Historian Max Hastings clearly articulates in *Armageddon*, his contemporary treatment of the Second World War:

The fumbled handling of Antwerp was among the principle causes of Allied failure to break into Germany in 1944. It was not merely that the port was unavailable for the shipment of supplies; through two months that followed, a large part of Montgomery’s forces had to be employed upon a task that could have been accomplished in days if the necessary energy and ‘grip’ been exercised at the beginning of September, when the enemy was incapable of resistance.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> “M520, General Operational Situation and Directive: 26 August 1944.”

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Adams, 105.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>142</sup> Stacey, *Victory*, 331.

<sup>143</sup> Hastings, *Armageddon*, 22.

Montgomery, in his own memoirs, admits that he underestimated the difficulties associated with clearing the Scheldt and opening the sea port at Antwerp: “I reckoned that the Canadian Army could do it *while* we were going for the Ruhr. I was wrong.”<sup>144</sup> At first glance this quote would appear to be a rare example of Montgomery admitting a failing. On second glance however, one might notice that the word *while* is italicized. If this is an editorial error, multiple publishers of Montgomery’s Memoirs have made it.<sup>145</sup> Sadly, Montgomery’s rationale for the use of this rogue italicized *while* is likely lost to history. The *Operation Overlord Report and Appreciation* of 1943 had always emphasized the need for seaports through which supplies would pass enroute to the forward deployed elements. While the Allies fought in the Normandy area the ground lines of communication used to move supplies from the beachhead to the forward deployed elements were manageable. With the closure of the Falaise Gap and the widespread retreat of the German Army, in the last weeks of August through early September the distance between the Normandy Beachhead and the advancing forces grew markedly, often in excess of 50 miles per day. While the escape of the Fifteenth German Army was a missed opportunity that bought Germany considerable time to prepare defensive positions, more devastating is that the entire Allied effort effectively ground to a halt for want of supplies. Antwerp was needed, yet before it could be used, its banks, both north and south, would have to be cleared through its 60 mile transit to the Channel.

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<sup>144</sup>Bernard Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Montgomery of Alamein* (London: Collins Publishers, 1958), 297.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 266.

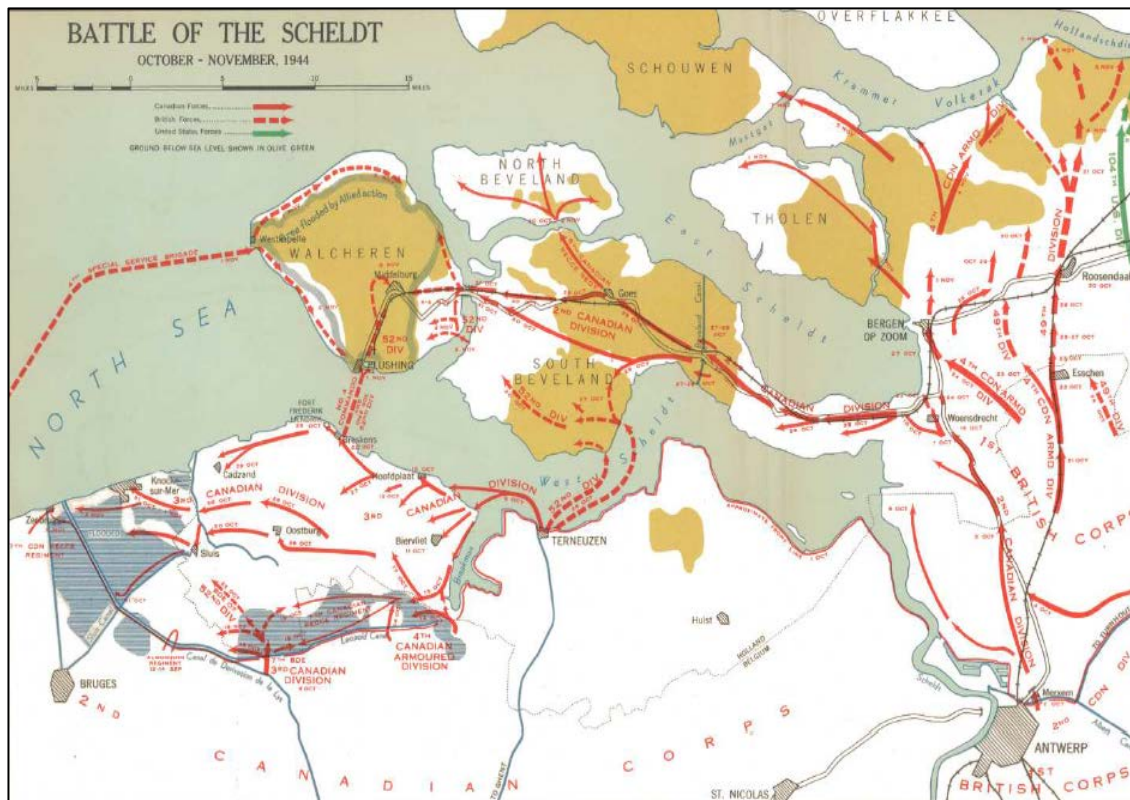


Figure 9. The Battle of the Scheldt

Source: C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945 – the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War – Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1966), 425.

## SEAPORTS

Antwerp's German defenses fell to the Allies on September 4, 1944, and yet the port itself was not useable due to strong resistance along the Scheldt until November 28, 1944, 85 days after the 11 (UK) Armoured Division had seized it intact.<sup>146</sup> In fact, on the day that Eisenhower sent the message above to Montgomery, the only seaport north of Normandy open for use was Dieppe.<sup>147</sup> The importance of Antwerp was not unknown to Montgomery. Sir Anthony Eden, who would ultimately become the British Prime Minister, recounted a meeting

<sup>146</sup>Moulton, 77.

<sup>147</sup>LeHavre would open that day as well.

with Montgomery which took place on August 19, 1944. Eden states “Montgomery explained that the Channel Ports had not the capacity that he needed and that if the battle unrolled as planned, he must have Antwerp.”<sup>148</sup> Yet no concerted effort was placed on completion of this important task when the opportunity presented itself.

From D-Day through October 1944, military equipment and stores transported across the Channel by ship, continued to arrive at the Normandy beachhead. While Normandy had the capacity to receive sufficient commodities to support the Allied advance, the road and rail network out of Normandy did not. Additional seaports, nearer to the fighting, were required to supply the force. Simply put, fuel and equipment could not be pushed forward as fast as they were needed to sustain the advance of multiple army groups.<sup>149</sup>

Seizure of the Pas de Calais seaports and the inland deep water port at Antwerp were required to shorten distances and to augment capacity. Allied forces had to stop their advance for want of needed supplies. Montgomery’s fixation on seizing the Ruhr Valley through Operation Market Garden, diverted attention from securing seaports and in particular opening Antwerp for Allied shipping.

The *Operation Overlord Report and Appreciation with Appendices* of July, 15, 1943, provides clear guidance on the importance of seaports to the success of the Allied assault on the continent and ultimate breakout. Outlined on the first page, is the assertion that the Allies “cannot escape the fact that we shall be forced to maintain a high proportion of our force over the beaches for the first two or three months while port facilities are being restored.”<sup>150</sup> The *Operation*

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<sup>148</sup>Anthony Eden, *The Reckoning: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon* (London: Cassell, 1965), 469.

<sup>149</sup>Van Creveld, 219-222.

<sup>150</sup>War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, *Operation Overlord Report and Appreciation with Appendices* (Office of the War Cabinet, London, 30 July 1943), ii.

*Overlord Report and Appreciation* further subdivides ports into two groups, the Brittany Group and the Seine Group.<sup>151</sup> Overlord called for the initial seizure of Cherbourg and then a decision point for the commander:

After the capture of Cherbourg the Supreme Allied Commander will have to decide whether to initiate operations to seize the Seine ports or whether he must content himself with first occupying the Brittany ports. In this decision he will have to be guided largely by the situation of the enemy forces.<sup>152</sup>

In the end, the Allies launched operations to secure the Brittany ports in advance of those geared towards the Pas de Calais. Unfortunately, the Allies failed in achieving their objective of securing a major Brittany port in useable condition.<sup>153</sup> In retrospect, a port to the west of Normandy would not have been particularly decisive. In the days following the closure of the Falaise Gap, the Allies began one of history's most rapid pursuits north and east out of Normandy. Seaports were needed in this direction.

The term catastrophic success is in common usage by contemporary military commanders and planners alike.<sup>154</sup> In essence it describes a positive set of circumstances which creates unexpected and new challenges. In the weeks following the closure of the Falaise Gap, both the American and British-Canadian forces added hundreds of miles to their ground lines of communications.<sup>155</sup> Emergency measures were established to supply the forward troops. This included the famed Red Ball Express and Montgomery pressing the vehicles of his follow-on

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<sup>151</sup>War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, *Operation Overlord Report and Appreciation with Appendices*, v. When describing the Seine Group the *Operation Overlord Report* outlines that to secure these ports would involve a crossing of the Seine. As such, it is likely that the Seine Group is actually referring to the "Channel Ports" within the Pas de Calais and beyond.

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>153</sup>Blumenson, *D-Day and the Battle for Normandy -Breakout and Pursuit*, 415.

<sup>154</sup>It is believed that President George W. Bush coined this term in 2004 when speaking on initial success in the war in Iraq.

<sup>155</sup>Van Creveld, 217.

maneuver forces into service as supply vehicles.<sup>156</sup> To make matters worse, in early September the British-Canadian force lost 1,400 three-ton trucks due to faulty pistons, which forced them to resort to using abandoned horse-drawn wagons to move supplies.<sup>157</sup> By early September, these emergency measures were no longer capable of satisfying the needs of the force. In the first days of September the preponderance of General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group was forced to stop.<sup>158</sup> Despite the logistical concerns, Montgomery retained a positive outlook on the prospect of a rapid end to the war based on the apparent collapse of German resistance in Northern France and Belgium. It is at this point that the "wide versus narrow front" debate began in earnest.<sup>159</sup>

On September 1, 1944, command of all Allied ground forces passed from Montgomery to Eisenhower.<sup>160</sup> While Montgomery was vehemently opposed to this change, his position had been merely temporary for the purposes of Operation Overlord and the ensuing breakout. Once the breakout's success was evident, and with American forces accounting for well over half the ground force, the change to an American ground commander was rational.<sup>161</sup> With this change however, the generally positive working relationship between Montgomery and Eisenhower began to sour.<sup>162</sup> As previously mentioned, the Allies had fully extended their logistics

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<sup>156</sup>Wilmot, 472-473. Horrock's highlights the difference between American and British supply protocol. ". . . the contrast between British and U.S. supply columns was astonishing. The British moved at a steady speed-each vehicle at regulation distance from the one in front-very orderly, very correct, very sedate, and, I am afraid, very, very slow compared with U.S. columns. . . No such nonsense as vehicle spacing for them [US convoys]; they just raced flat out for their destination and, in spite of not having the vaguest idea as to where they were going, they usually, thanks to indefatigable military police on powerful motor bikes, got themselves to their correct destination in the end." Horrocks, 69-70.

<sup>157</sup>Hastings, *Armageddon*, 23.

<sup>158</sup>Van Creveld, 220.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>160</sup>Hastings, *Armageddon*, 23.

<sup>161</sup>D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, 598-600.

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*, 600.

capabilities and action was required in order to maintain the initiative. On September 4, 1944, the Field Marshal provided Eisenhower with a short one-page proposal for future operations. He stated that at this point it was his assessment that “one really powerful and full-blooded thrust” might end the war and that “we have not suitable maintenance resources for two-full blooded thrusts.”<sup>163</sup> The later approach has been termed the “broad front” while the former the “narrow front.”<sup>164</sup> Monty went on to suggest that the thrust might be via the Ruhr or via Metz and the Saar although he recommended the Ruhr which would have made his Army Group the main effort. Finally, he suggests that any compromise solution would result in a less than “full-blooded thrust” and would inherently prolong the war.<sup>165</sup> The fact that Montgomery cites the supply situation as the primary reason why a “narrow front” would be optimal, disregards 21st Army Group’s responsibility to the greater Allied effort of furnishing seaports and yet highlights that he was indeed truly aware that supply was impacting the Allies opportunity to exploit the German retreat and retain initiative.<sup>166</sup> Eisenhower maintained the broad front approach, although as will be seen, he did focus attention on the 21st Army Groups boundaries; on September 10, 1944, Eisenhower gave approval for Montgomery to plan and mount a major airborne operation in the vicinity of the Dutch city of Arnhem.<sup>167</sup> While First Canadian Army continued to conduct operations in the Pas de Calais region to secure ports, these ports paled in comparison to the importance of Antwerp.

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<sup>163</sup>Tac HQ 21 Army Group, “Personal for Eisenhower Eyes Only from Montgomery M160 042056 September,” Box 21, in Walter Bedell Smith, *Collection of World War II Documents, 1941-1945 Series I: Allied Command, Subseries A: Combined Chiefs of Staff*, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

<sup>167</sup>D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life*, 610.

In 1944, Antwerp was one of the world's largest deep-water ports.<sup>168</sup> Not only did Antwerp possess 200 births and 600 cranes, but it also had the densest rail network in Europe.<sup>169</sup> The Allies' advance had been so rapid that the German force charged with defending the ports had failed to take measures to deny the Allies use of the port facilities prior to their evacuation. Specifically, the port's docks, cranes and storage facilities remained intact. The importance of Antwerp cannot be overstated. Not only was Antwerp over a hundred miles closer to the frontlines of the Allied forces than was Calais, but its capacity was exponentially greater. Ultimately Antwerp would support 80,000-100,000 tons of cargo per day. This figure is more than double the sum of all of the other Channel Ports between Antwerp and Normandy.<sup>170</sup>

By September 9, 1944, contrary to the opinion expressed to Sir Anthony Eden (less than three weeks earlier), Montgomery was now convinced that with one functional Pas de Calais port augmented by 1,000 tons of airlift, he could reach Munster and beyond without Antwerp.<sup>171</sup> While Van Creveld in his seminal work on logistics *Supplying War* has mathematically proven that Montgomery's "narrow front" proposal would have been supportable had Eisenhower been willing to halt Patton's Third Army indefinitely, Eisenhower had no such ambitions.<sup>172</sup> Understanding that this was not Eisenhower's intent, it is clear that Montgomery should have made every effort to set the conditions to support the greater Allied effort. While Montgomery personally stated that his decisions and actions was tempered by an overwhelming urge to bring the war to a rapid conclusion,<sup>173</sup> others have suggested that his vanity, ambition and personality

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<sup>168</sup>D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, 620.

<sup>169</sup>Atkinson, 330.

<sup>170</sup>Moulton, 77.

<sup>171</sup>Moulton, 52; Stacey, *Victory*. 310.

<sup>172</sup>Van Creveld, 227-230.

<sup>173</sup>Montgomery, *Memoirs* (London: Collins Publishers, 1958), 285-298.



conflict with Eisenhower may have blinded him to the importance of securing seaports. Operation Market Garden would occupy the Allies' plans and operations for the majority of September and would serve only to again delay the opening of Antwerp.

While Eisenhower may have elected to pursue the broad front approach, he concurrently approved in principal the airborne and ground assault on Arnhem, which ultimately became Operation Market Garden. This operation consisted of a corps sized airborne element from the First Allied Airborne Army parachuting in to seize key bridges while a corps sized ground force from XXX (UK) Corps would move north to affect a link-up. Perhaps the oft quoted passage from George B. MacDonald's *The Siegfried Line Campaign* best describes the rationale for Operation Market Garden:

The paratroopers and glidermen resting and training in England became, in effect, coins burning holes in SHAEF's pocket. This is not to say that SHAEF intended to spend the airborne troops rashly but that SHAEF had decided on the advisability of buying an airborne product and was looking about for the right occasion. Even the Germans believed an airborne attack imminent, although they had no fixed idea where.<sup>174</sup>

Operation Market Garden commenced on September 17, 1944, a mere 10 days following Eisenhower's approval of the concept. While Operation Market Garden is generally assessed to have been an unsuccessful operation, more germane to this study is the impact that Operation Market Garden had on the operations on its peripheries. While resources, equipment and staff effort were oriented on Operation Market Garden, flanking formations in essence were frozen to ensure that suitable supplies were provided in support of the Arnhem operation. General Patton aptly captured the sustainment issues in a letter to his wife written on the eve of Operation Market Garden, September 16, 1944: "I wish to God I was a first priority on supply but I aint. I have fed

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<sup>174</sup>MacDonald, 119-120.

the army on captured food, 200 000 pounds of Argentine beef and 100 000 gallons of [captured] gas for two days. . .”<sup>175</sup>

The above paragraphs highlight how important the Channel seaports and more importantly the seaport at Antwerp were to the Allies. Montgomery’s changing and evolving priorities in this regard have been discussed, as well as an assessment of distractions and other operations, which drew Montgomery’s attention away from seaports: the continuing broad versus narrow debate and Operation Market Garden. Throughout however, the Field Marshal did have First Canadian Army attempting to open these ports.

The Fifteenth German Army was afforded the opportunity in the early days of September to reinforce its existing fortresses along the coast, while concurrently crossing the Scheldt and preparing positions, which would deny the Allies transit between the Channel and Antwerp. In so doing, the German Army exploited the natural defensibility of Walcheren Island, which had complete command of the mouth of the Scheldt.

On August 26, 1944, Montgomery tasked First Canadian Army to send a corps to destroy the enemy and secure LeHavre while also securing the port of Dieppe and destroying “all enemy forces in the coastal belt up to Bruges.”<sup>176</sup> In response to this clear directive, Crerar sent I (UK) Corps to LeHavre, while the II (Cdn) Corps would seize Dieppe; Dieppe having been the location of Canada’s failed raid in 1942.<sup>177</sup> These two ports were quickly seized and I (UK) Corps remained in the vicinity of LeHavre for reconstitution while the II (Cdn) Corps continued north to commence operations to seize Boulogne, Calais and Cap Griz Nez. On September 14, 1944,

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<sup>175</sup>Blumenson, *The Patton Papers*, 549.

<sup>176</sup>“M520, General Operational Situation and Directive.”

<sup>177</sup>Stacey, *Six Years of War*, 349-387.

Montgomery issued a new directive which describes the tasks assigned to the First Canadian Army in the following sequence:

8. Complete the capture first of Boulogne, and then of Calais.
9. Dunkirk will be left to be dealt with later; for the present it will be merely masked.
10. The whole energies of the Army will be directed towards operations designed to enable full use to be made of the port of Antwerp.<sup>178</sup>

The directive goes on to mandate that I (UK) Corps Headquarters and 49th (UK) Division will move as early as possible to Antwerp, while 51st (UK) Division would remain in LeHavre providing all of its transport resources to support the First Canadian Army. Finally, this directive establishes that the First Canadian Army would assume responsibility for Antwerp effective September 17, 1944.<sup>179</sup> This simple directive provides true insight into why it took so long for First Canadian Army to clear the Scheldt and is well worth detailed examination.

First, this directive was issued over a week after Antwerp had been seized and as such, the Fifteenth German Army had largely escaped and fortified their positions. “[T]he whole of the energies of the Army” could not be towards Antwerp and at the same time continuing operations in Boulogne and Calais.<sup>180</sup> In order to allocate the “whole of the energies” meaning 100 percent, secondary objectives would need to have been abandoned.<sup>181</sup> While this may seem like a study in semantics, this order spurred tens of thousands of men to action. There was simply no room for misinterpretation. In this case, bearing in mind that Antwerp had nearly 10 times the capacity of Boulogne and Calais, focusing effort on Antwerp at the expense of these secondary objectives would have been prudent. It is obvious that a similar line of thinking was used when the decision

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<sup>178</sup>“M525, General Operational Situation and Directive.”

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

was made to bypass Dunkirk. Finally, the fact that the Army Group Commander is giving orders which name specific divisions is indicative of a breakdown in what would now be termed Mission Command. Known to have given “tactical instructions direct to officers beyond his immediate subordinates in the chain of command” Montgomery over-controlled.<sup>182</sup> Again it is worthy to note that since Montgomery was providing specific direction and tasks to I (UK) Corps and 49th (UK) Division, First Canadian Army was little more than a four division formation, which is closer in size to a corps than an army.

The next directive Montgomery issued came September 27, 1944, immediately following the completion of Operation Market Garden. This directive commences with the phrase “The enemy has re-acted violently since we launched the operations outlined in M525 [Operation Market Garden] . . . He knows we must be stretched administratively, and he will hold the fortress of Calais, Dunkirk, Walcheren, etc., as long as he can.”<sup>183</sup> This assessment is indicative of the fact that Montgomery was conscious that the pursuit was over, and that resistance would be tenacious. The intent of this directive is clear: “To open up the port of Antwerp . . . destroy the enemy forces that are preventing us from capturing the Ruhr.”<sup>184</sup> Again the tasks specifically assigned to the First Canadian Army are ambiguous. They were to continue operations towards Boulogne and Calais, mask Dunkirk so that it might be dealt with later, develop operations to enable free use of Antwerp and to “thrust strongly northwards . . . and so free the Second Army from its present commitment of a long left flank facing west.”<sup>185</sup> In this case Montgomery’s intent and the tasks assigned to First Canadian Army are conflicting. No additional resources had been

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<sup>182</sup>Hart, 80.

<sup>183</sup>“M527, General Operational Situation and Directive: 27 September 1944,” in 21 Army Group, *Directives Issued by C-in-C and HQ 21 Army Group*.

<sup>184</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup>*Ibid.*

provided to open Antwerp, no previously assigned tasks had been nullified, and in fact, new tasks were assigned which naturally would further slow the Canadian's ability to clear the Scheldt.

The Directive of October 9, 1944, finally provides clarity. It stated that First Canadian Army "will concentrate all available resources on the operations designed to give us free use of the port of Antwerp. The opening of this port will take priority over all other offensive operations."<sup>186</sup> Montgomery then goes on to offer the 52 (UK) Division "for the Antwerp operation if so required by the Canadian Army."<sup>187</sup> The day that this directive was issued, Eisenhower sent Montgomery the following message:

[W]e are now squarely up against the situation which has been anticipated for months and our intake into the continent will not repeat nor support our battle. Unless we have Antwerp producing by the middle of November our entire operations will come to a standstill. I must emphasize that, of all our operations on our entire front from Switzerland to the Channel, I consider Antwerp of first importance, and I believe that the operations designed to clear up the entrance require your personal attention.<sup>188</sup>

Antwerp was priority number one for Eisenhower. Four days later in a letter from Eisenhower to Montgomery, Eisenhower further states:

I have been informed, both by the Chief of the Imperial Staff and by the Chief of Staff of the United States Army that they seriously considered giving me a flat order that until the capture of Antwerp and its approaches was fully assured, this operation should take precedence over all others.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>"M530, General Operational Situation and Directive: 09 October 1944," in 21 Army Group, *Directives Issued by C-in-C and HQ 21 Army Group*.

<sup>187</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup>SHAEF Message to 21 Army Group Tac dated October 09, 1944, Reference number 561465 Box 21, in Smith, *Collection of World War II Documents*.

<sup>189</sup>General Eisenhower Letter to Field Marshal Montgomery dated October 13, 1944, Box 21, in Smith, *Collection of World War II Documents*.

Montgomery's directive of October 16, 1944, heeds Eisenhower's warnings. The Field Marshal enabled the Canadian Army through transferring responsibility for part of the front to Second Army freeing up the Canadians to concentrate entirely on the Scheldt.<sup>190</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The opening of Antwerp did not mark the end of First Canadian Army's fighting in Northwest Europe, but it did however represent the beginning of a static period in which the Army did not conduct a large-scale operation for a period of three months.<sup>191</sup> When fighting ceased for Walcheren Island, the Glengarry's and the vast majority of the Canadian Army had been in sustained contact with the enemy for roughly 155 days. This pause was not by design. It was the result of the assessment that the German Ardennes offensive might extend to the Canadian front. As such, the Canadians remained in position to defend against this option which ultimately, the Germans did not exercise.<sup>192</sup>

The First Canadian Army had achieved all of its objectives, but this had come at a significant cost; Canada's two infantry divisions had sustained casualties far in excess of those of the British.<sup>193</sup> While it fought with dogged determination in the late summer and fall of 1944, it had entered the campaign handicapped by a number of factors. It lacked combat experience, had limited training in the maneuvering of forces above the division level, and possessed a force structure ill prepared for the extremely high percentage of casualties that the infantry would

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<sup>190</sup>“M532, General Operational Situation and Directive: 16 October 1944,” in 21 Army Group, *Directives Issued by C-in-C and HQ 21 Army Group*.

<sup>191</sup>Stacey, *Victory*, 426.

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup>As an example, 3rd (Cdn) Infantry Division experienced 9,263 casualties from June 6 to October 1. In that same period, the British division which sustained the greatest casualties was 3 (UK) Division which sustained roughly 20 percent fewer casualties at 7,601. Montgomery, *Memoirs* (London: Collins Publishers, 1958), 297.

experience. In addition to this, the apparent personality conflict between its commander and Montgomery was indicative of a lack of mutual trust. Of these factors, the two of greatest significance were unquestionably the force structure and the lack of mutual trust. While Montgomery could not influence Canada's force structure and replacement system, he was certainly in a position to influence the tasks it was assigned. Due to the difficulties associated with the tasks assigned to the Canadians, Montgomery might have allocated greater resources and he should have provided more focused attention and oversight on these operations. Had he done so, he might have capitalized on the opportunity to both open Antwerp earlier, and to strike a death blow to the Fifteenth German Army as they conducted their crossing of the Scheldt.

Failure to pursue and destroy the Fifteenth German Army had far reaching effects. Most notably, it was this force that reinforced the existing defenses along the Scheldt Estuary which prevented Allied ships from safely reaching Antwerp. It took the Allies more than two months to clear these forces after the port at Antwerp had been secured. Once the Germans defending the Scheldt had been defeated, it then took an additional month to clear the estuary of mines. During this time the Allied forces were desperate for supplies and the Germans were afforded the opportunity to consolidate and regroup. Portions of the Fifteenth German bolstered the German forces in the vicinity of Arnhem and naturally played a role in countering Operation Market Garden.<sup>194</sup> This force then participated in the Ardennes counter-offensive of December 1944. They were positioned in the Heurtgen Forest opposite General Simpson's Ninth United States Army.<sup>195</sup> They then participated in the Rhineland campaign opposite General Hodges First United States Army. The Fifteenth German Army, trapped on September 4, 1944, escaped and went on

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<sup>194</sup>Historical Section Canadian Military Headquarters, "Report No. 188, Canadian Participation in the Operations in North-West Europe 1944. Part VI: Canadian Operations, 1 Oct- 8 Nov, The Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary," Ottawa, 16.

<sup>195</sup>Hugh Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington: Center of Military History, US Army, 1993), 52.

to fight for over seven more months. Montgomery allowed the Second British Army to bypass this force as they rapidly advanced towards the Rhine. This decision unquestionably prolonged the war and cost the Allies dearly.

While the escape of the Fifteenth German Army was a missed opportunity that bought Germany considerable time to prepare defensive positions, more devastating is that the entire Allied effort effectively ground to a halt for want of supplies. The Allies needed Antwerp, yet before it could be used, its banks had to be cleared through its 60-mile transit to the Channel. Antwerp fell to the Allies on September 4, 1944, and yet it was not until November 28 that it was actually useable by the Allies. The First Canadian Army, tasked with opening the approaches, was not given the resources it required until Eisenhower ultimately told Montgomery in no uncertain terms that it was to be made the priority.<sup>196</sup> Once the First Canadian Army was properly resourced, and freed from the responsibility to complete secondary tasks, it was able to orchestrate and execute the clearance of the Scheldt in a timely manner. Had Montgomery focused on achieving free use of Antwerp earlier, he could have achieved it.

In describing the Canadian Army's operations in Northwest Europe, Canadian historian David Bercusson states:

The Canadian contribution to victory pales beside that of the British, the Americans, or the Soviet Union. The Allies would have prevailed without Canada. But Canada helped immensely and, at certain times and in particular circumstances, Canadians played a decisive role in building Allied momentum to victory.<sup>197</sup>

The delays in opening Antwerp that ultimately slowed the Allies' progress in the late summer and fall of 1944 might have been minimized if Montgomery had employed his army group differently. Hindsight is twenty-twenty; Montgomery however, did not have this luxury. Had

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<sup>196</sup>SHAEF Message to 21 Army Group Tac dated October 09, 1944, Reference number 561465 Box 21, in Smith, *Collection of World War II Documents*; General Eisenhower Letter to Field Marshal Montgomery dated October 13, 1944, Box 21, in Smith, *Collection of World War II Documents*.

<sup>197</sup>Bercusson, 2.



Operation Market Garden been a resounding success, it is unlikely that historians would have taken much notice of the delays in opening Antwerp. It wasn't a success, and therefore the delays in opening Antwerp have drawn far more scrutiny than they might have otherwise. Despite its lack of combat experience at the outset of the campaign in Northwest Europe and a shortage of trained infantry replacements, the soldiers of Lieutenant Harry Murfitt's Stormont Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, alongside the dozens of other Canadian battalions and regiments of the First Canadian Army succeeded in opening the Channel Ports, eliminating the V1 threat against the United Kingdom, and opening Antwerp. As Montgomery stated in a congratulatory note to Simonds as the operations along the Scheldt neared completion on November 3, 1944:

It has been a fine performance, and one that could have been carried out only by first class troops. The Canadian Army is composed of troops from many different nations and countries. But the way in which you have all pulled together, and operated as one fighting machine, has been an inspiration to us all. I congratulate you personally.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup>Historical Section Canadian Military Headquarters, "Report No. 188," 141.

## APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF KEY FIRST CANADIAN ARMY EVENTS

Serial	Date	Event	Remarks
1	May 1943	Draft Plan Operation Overlord	
2	June 6, 1944	D-Day	
3	Mid June, 1944	V1 rocket attacks commence against the UK	
4	July 25-31, 1944	Operation Cobra	
5	August 22, 1944	Falaise Gap Closed	Operation Fusillade
6	August 26, 1944	First Canadian Army given order to seize Channel Ports	
7	August 31, 1944	Canadians cross Seine	
8	September 4, 1944	Antwerp Seized by XXX Corps	
9	September 1, 1944	Dieppe Seized	Operation Astonia
10	September 1, 1944	Last V1 fired on UK from Pas de Calais region	
11	September 5, 1944	Antwerp Seized	
12	September 7, 1944	Dieppe Port Open	
13	September 12, 1944	LeHavre Seized	
14	September 17-25, 1944	Operation Market Garden	
15	September 17-22, 1944	Boulogne Seized	Operation Wellhit
16	September 25-30, 1944	Calais Seized	Operation Undergo
17	September 29, 1944	Cap Gris Nez Seized	Operation Undergo
18	October 9, 1944	Le Havre Port Opened	
19	October 12, 1944	Boulogne Port Open	
20	October 31-November 8, 1944	Walcheren Island Seized	Operation Infatuate
21	November 26, 1944	Antwerp Port Open	Nearly two months post seizure due to German resistance in Scheldt Estuary
22	May 9, 1945	Dunkirk Surrenders	

*Source:* Created by author.

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